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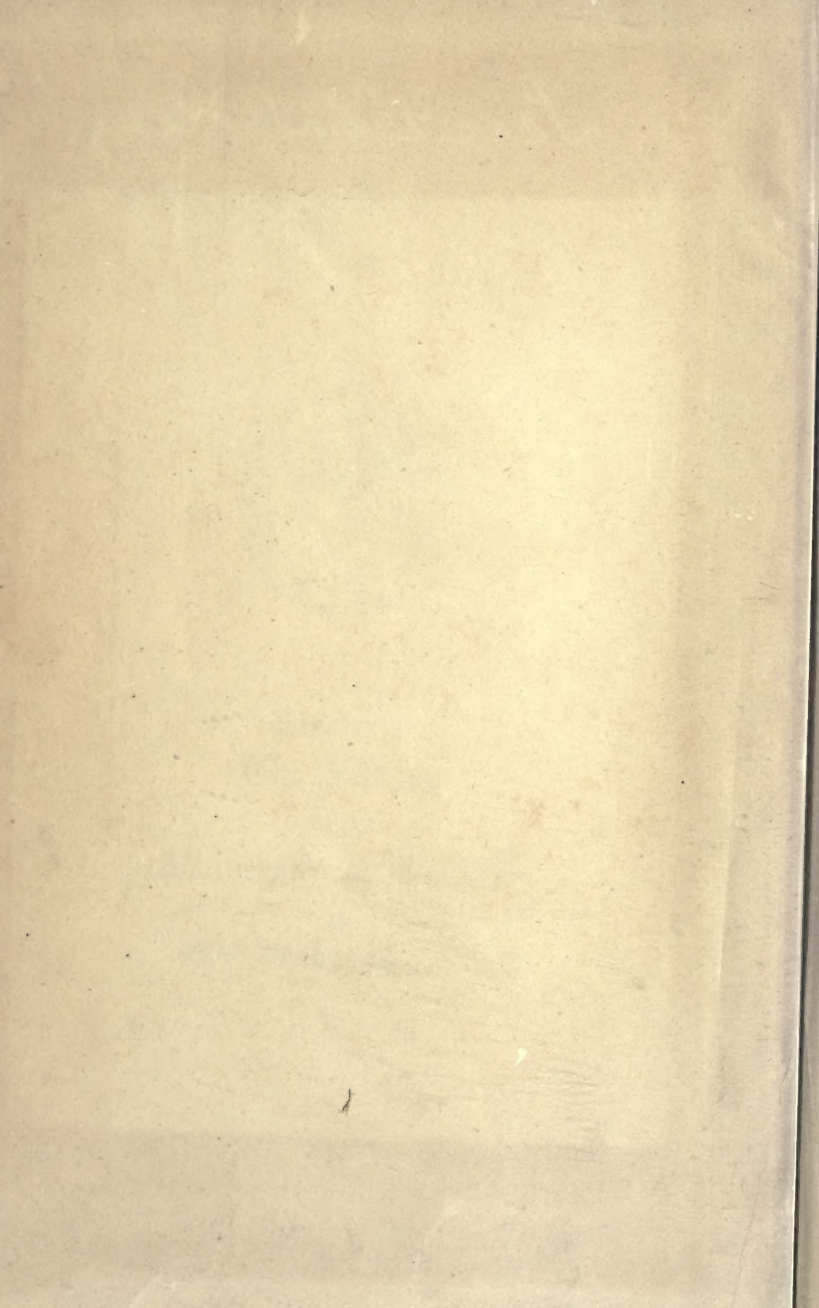




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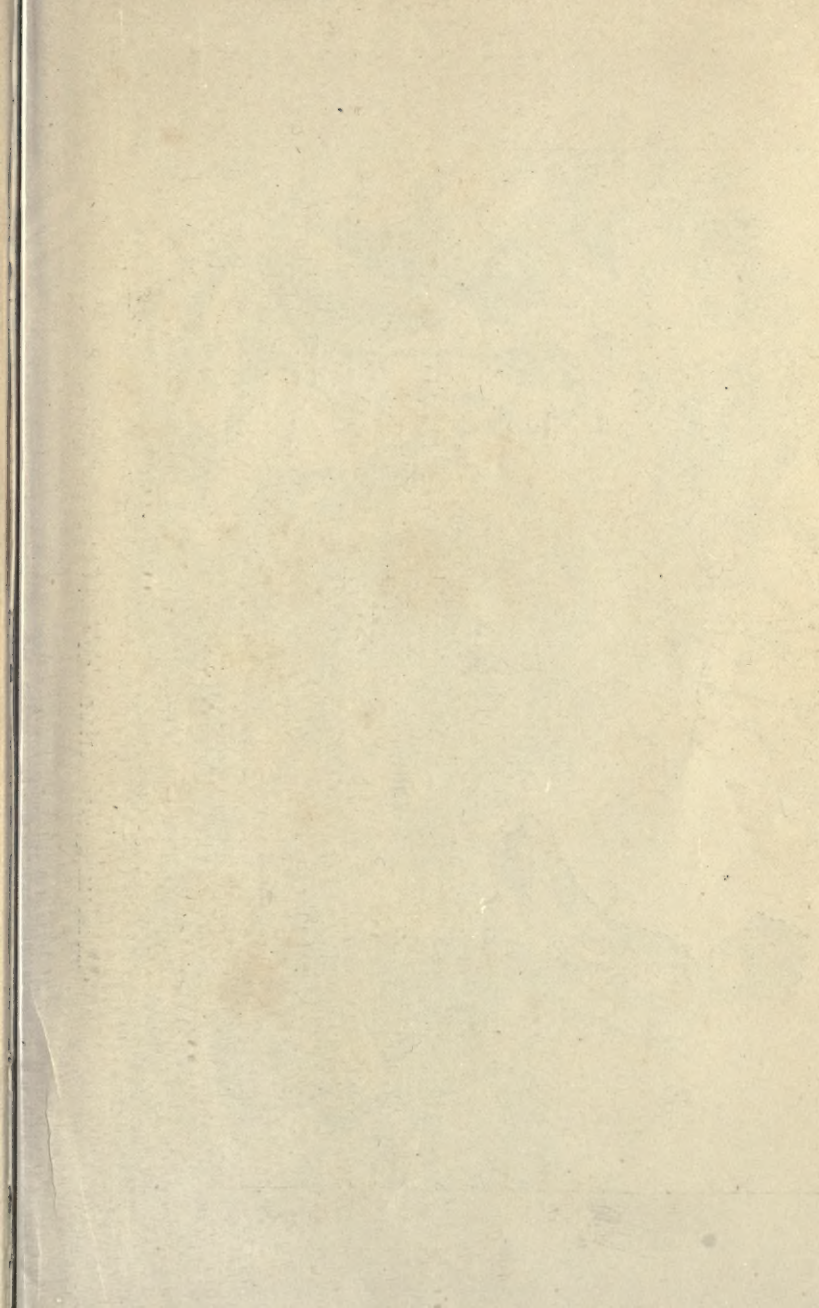
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Sara L. Woolley.

June 1897



DYNEVOR TERRACE

BY THEOPHILUS





"She filled his cap, and bathed his face, apparently to his great relief."—Page 50.

DYNEVOR TERRACE

OR

THE CLUE OF LIFE

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE



ILLUSTRATED BY ADRIAN STOKES

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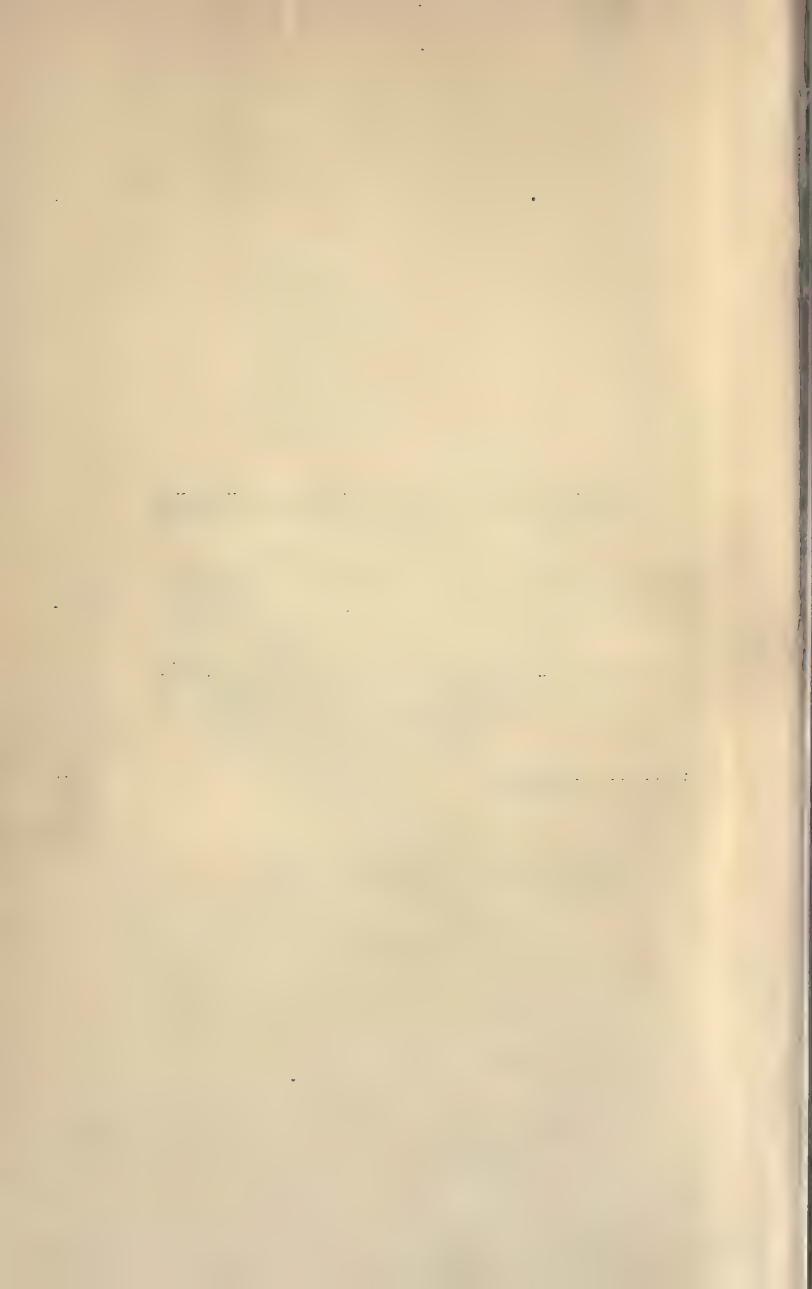
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

"She filled his cap, and bathed his face, apparently to his great relief"	Page 50
" 'There is no harm done, you see,' as she cracked away the cooled wax—'not even a mark to remind me of this happy Christmas.' "	,, 174
" 'Bring the other lamp' "	,, 471



DYNEVOR TERRACE

CHAPTER I

CHARLOTTE

Farewell rewards and dainties,
Good housewives now may say,
For now foul sluts in dairies
May fare as well as they.—BP. CORBET

AN ancient leafless stump of a horse-chestnut stood in the middle of a dusty field, bordered on the south side by a row of houses of some pretension.

Against this stump, a pretty delicate fair girl of seventeen, whose short lilac sleeves revealed slender white arms, and her tight, plain cap tresses of flaxen hair that many a beauty might have envied, was banging a cocoa-nut mat, chanting by way of accompaniment, in a sort of cadence—

‘I have found out a gift for my fair,
I have found where the wood-pigeons breed;
But let me the plunder forbear,
She will say——’

‘Hollo, I’ll give you a shilling for ’em!’ was the unlooked-for conclusion, causing her to start aside with a slight scream, as there stood beside her a stout, black-eyed, round-faced lad, his ruddy cheeks and loutish air showing more rusticity than agreed with his keen, saucy expression, and mechanic’s dress.

‘So that’s what you call beating a mat,’ said he, catching it from her hands, and mimicking the tender clasp of her little fingers. ‘D’ye think it’s alive, that you use it so gingerly? Look here! Give it him well!’ as he made it resound against the tree, and emit a whirlwind of dust. ‘Lay it into him with some jolly good song fit to fetch a stroke home with! Why, I heard my young lord say, when Shakspeare was a butcher, he used to make speeches at the calves, as if they was for a sacrifice, or ever he could lift a knife to ’em.’

'Shakspeare! He as wrote Romeo and Juliet, and all that! He a butcher? Why, he was a poet!' cried the girl, indignantly.

'If you know better than Lord Fitzjocelyn, you may!' said the boy.

'I couldn't have thought it!' sighed the maiden.

'It's the best of it!' cried the lad, eagerly. 'Why, Charlotte, don't ye see, he rose hisself. Anybody may rise hisself as has a mind to it!'

'Yes, I've read that in books,' said Charlotte. 'You can, men can, Tom, if you would but educate yourself like Edmund in the *Old English Baron*. But then, you know whose son you are. There can't be no catastrophe—'

'I don't want none,' said Tom. 'We are all equal by birth, so the orator proves without a doubt, and we'll show it one of these days. A rare lady I'll make of you yet, Charlotte Arnold.'

'O hush, Tom, I can never be a lady—and I can't stand dawdling here—nor you neither. 'Tisn't right to want to be out of our station; though I do wish I lived in an old castle, where the maidens worked tapestry, and heard minstrels, and never had no stairs to scour. Come, give me my mats, and thank you kindly!'

'I'll take 'em in,' said Tom, shouldering them. ''Tis breakfast-hour, so I thought I'd just run up and ax you when my young lord goes up to Oxford.'

'He is gone,' said Charlotte; 'he was here yesterday to take leave of missus. Mr. James goes later—'

'Gone!' cried Tom. 'If he didn't say he'd come and see me at Mr. Smith's!'

'Did you want to speak to him?'

'I wanted to see him particular. There's a thing lays heavy on my mind. You see that place down in Ferny dell—there's a steep bank down to the water. Well, my young lord was very keen about building a kind of steps there in the summer, and he and I settled the stones, and I was to cement 'em. By comes Mr. Frost, and finds faults, what I thought he'd no call to; so I flings down my trowel, and wouldn't go on for he! I was so mortal angry, I would not go back to the work; and I believe my lord forgot it—and then he went back to college; and Frampton and Gervas, they put on me; and you know how 'twas I come away from Ormersfield. I was not going to say a word to one of that lot! but if I could see Lord Fitzjocelyn, I'd tell him they stones arn't fixed; and if the frost gets into 'em, there'll be a pretty go next time there's a tolerablist weight! But there—it is his own look-out! If he never thought it worth his while to keep his promise, and come and see me—'

'O Tom! that isn't right! He only forgot—I heard Mrs. Beckett telling him he'd forget his own head if it wasn't fixed on, and Mr. James is always at him.'

'Forget! Aye, there's nothing gentlefolks forget like poor folks. But I've done with he! Let him look out—I kept my promises to him long enough; but if he don't keep his'n—'

'For shame, for shame, Tom! you don't mean it!' cried Charlotte. 'But, oh!' with a different tone, 'give me the mat! There's the old lord and Mr. Poynings riding down the terrace!'

'I ain't ashamed of nothing!' said the lad, proudly; and as Charlotte snatched away the mats, and vanished like a frightened hare, he stalked along like a village Hampden, muttering, 'The old tyrant shall see whether I'm to be trampled on!' and with both hands in his pockets, he gazed straight up into the face of the grave elderly gentleman, who never even perceived him. He could merely bandy glances with Poynings the groom, who was so far from indifferent that he significantly lifted up the end of his whip. Nothing could more have gratified Tom, who retorted with a grimace and murmur, 'Don't you wish you may catch me? You jealous syc—what is the word, sick of uncles or aunts, was it, that the orator called 'em? He'd say I'd a good miss of being one of that sort, and that my young lord there opened my eyes in time. No better than the rest of 'em—'

And the clock striking eight, he quickened his pace to return to his work. He had for the two or three previous years been nominally under the gardener at Ormersfield, but really a sort of follower and favourite to the young heir, Lord Fitzjocelyn—a position which had brought on him dislike from the superior servants, who were not propitiated by his independent and insubordinate temper. Faults on every side had led to his dismissal; but Lord Fitzjocelyn had placed him at an iron-monger's shop in the town of Northwold, where he had been just long enough to become accessible to the various temptations of a lad in such a situation.

Charlotte sped hastily round the end of the block of buildings, hurried down the little back garden, and flew breathlessly into her own kitchen, as a haven of refuge; but she found a tall, stiff, starched, elderly woman standing just within the door, and heard her last words.

'Well! as I said, 'tis no concern of mine; only I thought it the part of a friend to give you a warning, when I seen it with my own eyes!—Ah! here she is!' as Charlotte dropped into a chair. 'Yes, yes, Miss, you need not think to deceive me; I saw you from Miss Mercy's window—'

'Saw what?' faintly exclaimed Charlotte.

'You know well enough,' was the return. 'You may think to blind Mrs. Beckett here, but I know what over good-nature to young girls comes to. Pretty use to make of your fine scholarship, to be encouraging followers and sweethearts, at that time in the morning too!'

'Speak up, Charlotte,' said the other occupant of the room,

a pleasant little brisk woman, with soft brown eyes, a clear pale skin, and a face smooth, in spite of nearly sixty years; 'speak up, and tell Mrs. Martha the truth, that you never encouraged no one.'

The girl's face was all one flame; but she rose up, and clasping her hands together, exclaimed—'Me encourage! I never thought of what Mrs. Martha says! I don't know what it is all about!'

'Here, Jane Beckett,' cried Mrs. Martha; 'd'ye see what 'tis to vindicate her! Will you take her word against mine, that she's been gossiping this half-hour with that young rogue as was turned off at Ormersfield?'

'Tom Madison!' cried the girl, in utter amaze. 'Oh! Mrs. Martha!'

'Well! I can't stop!' said Martha. 'I must get Miss Faithful's breakfast; but if you was under me, Miss Charlotte, I can tell you it would be better for you! You'll sup sorrow yet, and you'll both recollect my advice, both of you.'

Wherewith the Cassandra departed, and Charlotte, throwing her apron over her face, began to cry and sob piteously.

'My dear! what is it now?' exclaimed her kind companion, pulling down her apron, and trying to draw down first one, then the other of the arms which persisted in veiling the crimson face. 'Surely you don't think missus or I would mistrust you, or think you'd take up with the likes of him!'

'How could she be so cruel—so spiteful,' sobbed Charlotte, 'when he only came to ask one question, and did a good turn for me with the mats. I never thought of such a thing. Sweetheart, indeed! So cruel of her!'

'Bless me!' said Jane, 'girls used to think it only civility to say they had a sweetheart!'

'Don't, Mrs. Beckett! I hate the word! I don't want no such thing! I won't never speak to Tom Madison again, if such constructions is to be put on it!'

'Well, after all, Charlotte dear, that will be the safest way. You are young yet, and best not to think of settling, special if you aren't sure of one that is steady and religious; and you'd better keep yourself up, and not get a name for gossiping—though there's no harm done yet, so don't make such a work. Bless me, if I don't hear his lordship's voice! He ain't never come so early!'

'Yes, he is,' said Charlotte, recovering from her sobs; 'he rode up as I came in.'

'Well, to be sure, he is come to breakfast! I hope nothing's amiss with my young lord! I must run up with a cup and plate; and you, make the place tidy, in case Mr. Poynings comes in. You'd better run into the scullery and wash your face; 'tis all tears! You're a terrible one to cry, Charlotte!' and with a kind, cheering smile and caress, Mrs. Beckett bustled off, leaving Charlotte to restore herself to the little handy piece

of household mechanism which kind, patient, motherly training had rendered her.

Charlotte Arnold had been fairly educated at a village school, and tenderly brought up at home till left an orphan, when she had been taken into her present place. She had much native refinement and imagination, which, half cultivated, produced a curious mixture of romance and simplicity. Her insatiable taste for reading was meritorious in the eyes of Mrs. Beckett, who, unlearned herself, thought any book better than 'gadding about,' and, after hearing her daily portion of the Bible, listened to the most adventurous romances, with a sense of pleasure and duty in keeping the girl to her book. She loved the little fragile orphan, taught her, and had patience with her, and trusted the true high sound principle which she recognized in Charlotte, amid much that she could not fathom, and set down alternately to the score of scholarship and of youth.

Taste, modesty, and timidity were guards to Charlotte. A broad stare was terror to her, and she had many a fictitious horror, as well as better-founded ones. Truly she said, she hated the broad words Martha had used. One who craved a true knight to be twitted with a sweetheart! Martha and Tom Madison were almost equally distasteful, as connected with such a reproach; and the little maiden drew into herself, promenaded her fancy in castles and tournaments, kept under Jane's wing, and was upheld by her as a sensible, prudent girl.

CHAPTER II

AN OLD SCHOOLMISTRESS

I praise thee, matron, and thy due
Is praise, heroic praise and true;
With admiration I behold
Thy gladness unsubdued and bold.
Thy looks and gestures all present
The picture of a life well spent;
Our human nature throws away
Its second twilight and looks gay.—WORDSWORTH

UNCONSCIOUS of Charlotte's flight and Tom's affront, the Earl of Ormersfield rode along Dynevor Terrace—a row of houses with handsome cemented fronts, tragic and comic masks alternating over the downstairs windows, and the centre of the block adorned with a pediment and colonnade; but there was an air as if something ailed the place: the gardens were weedy, the glass doors hazy, the cement stained and scarred, and many of the windows closed and dark, like eyes wanting speculation, or with merely the dreary words 'To be let' enlivening their blank gloom. At the house where Charlotte had vanished, he drew his rein, and opened the gate—not one of the rusty ones—he

entered the garden, where all was trim and fresh, the shadow of the house lying across the sward, and preserving the hoar frost, which, in the sunshine, was melting into diamond drops on the lingering China roses.

Without ring or knock, he passed into a narrow, carpetless vestibule, unadorned except by a beautiful blue Wedgewood vase, and laying down hat and whip, mounted the bare staircase, long since divested of all paint or polish. Avoiding the door of the principal room, he opened another at the side, and stood in a flood of sunshine, pouring in from the window, which looked over all the roofs of the town, to the coppices and moorlands of Ormersfield. On the bright fire sung a kettle, a white cat purred on the hearth, a canary twittered merrily in the window, and the light smiled on a languishing Dresden shepherdess and her lover on the mantelpiece, and danced on the ceiling, reflected from a beautifully chased silver cream-jug—an inconsistent companion for the homely black teapot and willow-patterned plates, though the two cups of rare Indian porcelain were not unworthy of it. The furniture was the same mixture of the ordinary and the choice, either worn and shabby, or such as would suit a virtuoso, but the whole arranged with taste and care that made the effect bright, pleasant, and comfortable. Lord Ormersfield stood on the hearthrug waiting. His face was that of one who had learnt to wait, more considerate than acute, and bearing the stamp both of toil and suffering, as if grief had taken away all mobility of expression, and left a stern, thoughtful steadfastness.

Presently a lady entered the room. Her hair was white as snow, and she could not have seen less than seventy-seven years; but beauty was not gone from her features—smiles were still on her lips, brightness in her clear hazel eyes, buoyancy in her tread, and alertness and dignity in her tall, slender, unbent figure. There was nothing so remarkable about her as the elasticity as well as sweetness of her whole look and bearing, as if, while she had something to love, nothing could be capable of crushing her.

‘You here!’ she exclaimed, holding out her hand to her guest. ‘You are come to breakfast.’

‘Thank you; I wished to see you without interrupting your day’s work. Have you many scholars at present?’

‘Only seven, and three go into school at Easter. Jem and Clara wish me to undertake no more, but I should sorely miss the little fellows. I wish they may do me as much credit as Sydney Calcott. He wrote himself to tell me of his success.’

‘I am glad to hear it. He is a very promising young man.’

‘I tell him I shall come to honour, as the old dame who taught him to spell. My scholars may make a Dr. Busby of me in history.’

'I am afraid your preferment will depend chiefly on James and young Calcott.'

'Nay, Louis tells me that he is going to read wonderfully hard ; and if he chooses, he can do more than even Sydney Calcott.'

'If !' said the Earl.

Jane here entered with another cup and plate, and Lord Ormersfield sat down to the breakfast-table. After some minutes' pause he said, 'Have you heard from Peru ?'

'Not by this mail. Have you ?'

'Yes, I have. Mary is coming home.'

'Mary !' she cried, almost springing up—'Mary Ponsonby ? This is good news—unless,' as she watched his grave face, 'it is her health that brings her.'

'It is. She has consulted the surgeon of the *Libra*, a very able man, who tells her that there is absolute need of good advice and a colder climate ; and Ponsonby has consented to let her and her daughter come home in the *Libra*. I expect them in February.'

'My poor Mary ! But she will get better away from him. I trust he is not coming !'

'Not he,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'Dear, dear Mary ! I had scarcely dared to hope to see her again,' cried the old lady, with tears in her eyes. 'I hope she will be allowed to be with us, not kept in London with his sister. London does her no good.'

'The very purport of my visit,' said Lord Ormersfield, 'was to ask whether you could do me the favour to set aside your scholars, and enable me to receive Mrs. Ponsonby at home.'

'Thank you—oh, thank you. There is nothing I should like better, but I must consider—'

'Clara would find a companion in the younger Mary in the holidays ; and if James would make Fitzjocelyn his charge, it would complete the obligation. It would be by far the best arrangement for Mary's comfort, and it would be the greatest satisfaction to me to see her with you at Ormersfield.'

'I believe it would indeed,' said the old lady, more touched than the outward manner of the Earl seemed to warrant. 'I would—you know I would do my very best that you and Mary should be comfortable together'—and her voice trembled—'but you see I cannot promise all at once. I must see about these little boys. I must talk to Jem. In short, you must not be disappointed'—and she put her hands before her face, trying to laugh, but almost overcome.

'Nay, I did not mean to press you,' said Lord Ormersfield, gently ; 'but I thought, since James has had the fellowship and Clara has been at school, that you wished to give up your pupils.'

'So I do,' said the lady, but still not yielding absolutely.

'For the rest, I am very anxious that James should accept

Fitzjocelyn as his pupil. I have always considered their friendship as the best hope ; and other plans have had so little success, that—'

'I'm not going to hear Louis abused !' she exclaimed, gaily.

'Yes,' said Lord Ormersfield, with a look nearly approaching a smile, 'you are the last person I ought to invite, if I wish to keep your nephew unspoiled.'

'I wish there were any one else to spoil him !'

'For his sake, then, come and make Ormersfield cheerful. It will be far better for him.'

'And for you, to see more of Jem,' she added. 'If he were yours, what would you say to such hours ?'

The last words were aimed at a young man who came briskly into the room, and as he kissed her, and shook hands with the Earl, answered in a quick, bright tone, 'Shocking, aye. All owing to sitting up till one !'

'Reading ?' said the Earl.

'Reading,' he answered, with a sort of laughing satisfaction in dashing aside the approval expressed in the query, 'but not quite as you suppose. See here,' as he held up maliciously a railway novel.

'I am afraid I know where it came from,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'Exactly so,' said James. 'It was Fitzjocelyn's desertion of it that excited my curiosity.'

'Indeed. I should have thought his desertions far too common to excite any curiosity.'

'By no means. He always has a reason.'

'A plausible one.'

'More than plausible,' cried James, excitement sparkling in his vivid black eyes. 'It happens that this is the very book that you would most rejoice to see distasteful to him—low morality, false principles, morbid excitement, not a line that ought to please a healthy mind.'

'Yet it has interest enough for you.'

'I am not Fitzjocelyn.'

'You know how to plead for him.'

'I speak simple truth,' bluntly answered James, running his hand through his black hair, to the ruin of the morning smoothness, so that it, as well as the whole of his quick, dark countenance, seemed to have undergone a change from sunny south to stormy north in the few moments since his first appearance.

After a short silence, Lord Ormersfield turned to him, saying, 'I have been begging a favour of my aunt, and I have another to ask of you,' and repeating his explanation, begged him to undertake the tutorship of his son.

'I shall not be at liberty at Easter,' said James ; 'I have all but undertaken some men at Oxford.'

'Oh, my dear Jem!' exclaimed the old lady, 'is that settled beyond alteration?'

'I am not going to throw them over.'

'Then I shall hope for you at Midsummer,' said the Earl.

'We shall see how things stand,' he returned, ungraciously.

'I shall write to you,' said Lord Ormersfield, still undaunted, and soon after taking his leave.

'Cool!' cried James, as soon as he was gone. 'To expect you to give up your school at his beck, to come and keep house for him as long as it may suit him!'

'Nay, Jem, he knew how few boys I have, and that I intended to give them up. You don't mean to refuse Louis?' she said, imploringly.

'I shall certainly not take him at Easter. It would be a mere farce intended to compensate to us for giving up the school, and I'll not lend myself to it while I can have real work.'

'At Midsummer, then. You know he will never let Louis spend a long vacation without a tutor.'

'I hate to be at Ormersfield,' proceeded James, vehemently, 'to see Fitzjocelyn browbeaten and contradicted every moment, and myself set up for a model. I may steal a horse, while he may not look over the wall! Did you observe the inconsistency?—angry with the poor fellow first for having the book, and then for not reading the whole, while it became amiable and praiseworthy in me to burn out a candle over it!'

'Ah! that was my concern. I tell him he would sing another note if you were his son.'

'I'd soon make him! I would not stand what Louis does. The more he is set down and sneered at, the more *debonnaire* he looks, till I could rave at him for taking it so easily.'

'I hoped you might have hindered them from fretting each other, as they do so often.'

'I should only be a fresh element of discord, while his lordship will persist in making me his pattern young man. It makes me hate myself, especially as Louis is such an unaccountable fellow that he won't.'

'I am sorry you dislike the plan so much.'

'Do you mean that you wish for it, grandmamma?' cried he, turning full round on her with an air of extreme amazement. 'If you do, there's an end of it; but I thought you valued nothing more than an independent home.'

'Nor would I give it up on any account,' said she. 'I do not imagine this could possibly last for more than a few months, or a year at the utmost. But you know, dear Jem, I would do nothing you did not like.'

'That's nothing to the purpose,' replied James. 'Though it is to be considered whether Ormersfield is likely to be the best preparation for Clara's future life. However, I see you wish it—'

'I confess that I do, for a few months at least, which need interfere neither with Clara nor with you. I have not seen Lord Ormersfield so eager for many years, and I should be very sorry to prevent those two from being comfortably together in the old home—'

'And can't that be without a chaperon?' exclaimed James, laughing. 'Why, his lordship is fifty-five; and she can't be much less. That is a good joke.'

'It is not punctilio,' said his grandmother, looking distressed. 'It is needful to be on the safe side with such a man as Mr. Ponsonby. My fear is that he may send her home with orders not to come near us.'

'She used to be always at Ormersfield in the old times.'

'Yes, when my sister was alive. Ah! you were too young to know about those matters then. The fact was, that things had come to such a pass from Mr. Ponsonby's neglect and unkindness, that Lord Ormersfield, standing in the place of her brother, thought it right to interfere. His mother went to London with him, to bring poor Mary and her little girl back to Ormersfield, and there they were till my sister's death, when of course they could not remain. Mr. Ponsonby had just got his appointment as British envoy in Peru, and wished her to go with him. It was much against Lord Ormersfield's advice; but she thought it her duty, poor dear. I believe he positively hates Lord Ormersfield; and as if for a parting unkindness, he left his little girl at school with orders to spend her holidays with his sister, and never to be with us.'

'That accounts for it!' said James. 'I never knew all this, nor why we were so entirely cut off from Mary Ponsonby. I wonder what she is now! She was a droll sturdy child in those days! We used to call her Downright Dunstable! She was almost of the same age as Louis, and a great deal stouter, and used to fight for him and herself too. Has not she been out in Peru?'

'Yes, she went out at seventeen. I believe she is an infinite comfort to her mother.'

'Poor Mary! Well, we children lived in the middle of a tragedy, and little suspected it! By the bye, what relation are the Ponsonbys to us?'

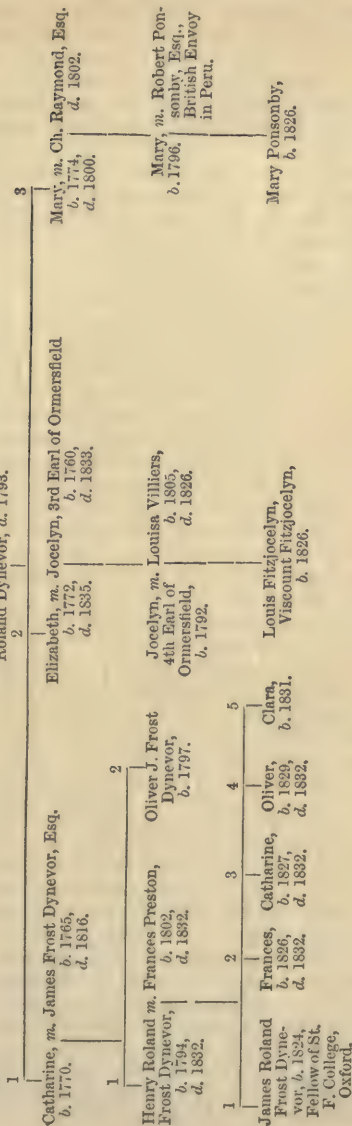
'Mrs. Ponsonby is my niece. My dear sister, Mary—'

'Married Mr. Raymond—yes, I know! I'll make the whole lucid; I'll draw up a pedigree, and Louis shall learn it.' And with elaborate neatness he wrote as follows, filling in the dates from the first leaf of an old Bible, after his grandmother had left the room. The task, lightly undertaken, became a mournful one; and as he read over his performance, his countenance varied from the gentleness of regret to a look of sarcastic pride, as though he felt that the world had dealt hardly by him, and yet he disdained to complain.

KING ARTHUR.

Pendragons and Dynevors innumerable.

Roland Dynevor, *d.* 1793.



‘Since 1816,’ muttered James, as he finished. ‘Thirty years of drudgery! When shall I be able to relieve her? Ha! O. J. F. Dynevor, Esquire; if it were you who were coming from Peru, you would find a score to settle!’

He ran down-stairs to assist his grandmother in the Latin lessons of her little school, the usual employment of his vacations.

Catharine Dynevor had begun life with little prospect of spending nearly half of it as mistress of a school.

Her father was the last male of the Dynevors of Cheveleigh—a family mounting up to the days of the Pendragons—and she had been made to take the place of an eldest son, inheriting the extensive landed property on condition that her name and arms should be assumed in case of her marriage. Her choice was one of the instances in which her affections had the mastery over her next strongest characteristic, family pride. She married a highly-educated and wealthy gentleman, of good family, but of mercantile connections, such as her father, if living, would have disdained. Her married life was, however, perfectly unclouded; her ample means gave her the power of dispensing joy, and her temperament was so blithe and unselfish that no pleasure ever palled upon her. Cheveleigh was a proverb for hospitality, affording unfailing fêtes for all ages, full of graceful ease and freedom that inspired enjoyment.

Mr. Frost Dynevor was a man of refined taste, open-handed even to extravagance, liberal in all his appointments, and gratifying to the utmost his love of art and decoration; while his charities and generous actions were hearty and lavish enough to satisfy even his warm-hearted wife.

Joined with all this was a strong turn for speculations. When the mind has once become absorbed in earthly visions of wealth and prosperity, the excitement exercises such a fascination over the senses that the judgment loses balance. Bold assumptions are taken as certainties, and made the foundation of fresh fabrics—the very power of discerning between fact and possibility departs, and, in mere good-will, men, honest and honourable at heart, risk their own and their neighbours’ property, and ruin their character and good name, by the very actions most foreign to their nature, ere it had fallen under the strong delusion.

Mr. Frost Dynevor had the misfortune to live in a country rich in mineral wealth, and to have a brother-in-law easily guided, and with more love of figures than power of investigating estimates on a large scale. Mines were set on foot, companies established, and buildings commenced, and the results were only to be paralleled by those of the chalybeate springs discovered by Mr. Dynevor at the little town of Northwold, which were pronounced by his favourite hanger-on to be destined ‘literally to cut the throat of Bath and Cheltenham.’

Some towns are said to have required the life of a child ere their foundations could be laid. Many a speculation has swal-

lowed a life and fortune before its time for thriving has come. Mr. Frost Dynevor and Lord Ormersfield were the foremost victims to the Cheveleigh iron foundries and the Northwold baths. The close of the war brought a commercial crisis that their companies could not stand ; and Mr. Dynevor's death spared him from the sight of the crash, which his talent and sagacity might possibly have averted. He had shown no misgivings ; but, no sooner was he removed from the helm, than the vessel was found on the brink of destruction. Enormous sums had been sunk without tangible return, and the liabilities of the companies far surpassed anything that they had realized.

Lord Ormersfield was stunned and helpless. Mrs. Dynevor had but one idea—namely, to sacrifice everything to clear her husband's name. Her sons were mere boys, and the only person who proved himself able to act or judge was the heir of Ormersfield, then about four-and-twenty, who came forward with sound judgment and upright dispassionate sense of justice to cope with the difficulties and clear away the involvements.

He joined his father in mortgaging land, sacrificing timber, and reducing the establishment ; so as to set the estate in the way of finally becoming free, though at the expense of rigid economy and self-denial.

Cheveleigh could not have been saved, even had the heiress not been willing to yield everything to satisfy the just claims of the creditors. She was happy when she heard that it would suffice, and that no one would be able to accuse her husband of having wronged him. But for this, she would hardly have submitted to retain what her nephew succeeded in securing for her—namely, an income of about 150*l.* per annum, and the row of houses called Dynevor Terrace, one of the building ventures at Northwold. This was the sole dependence with which she and her sons quitted the home of their forefathers. 'Never mind, mother,' said Henry, kissing her, to prevent the tears from springing, 'home is wherever we are together !' 'Never fear, mother,' echoed Oliver, with knitted brow and clenched hands, 'I will win it back.'

Oliver was a quiet lad, of diligent, methodical habits, and he willingly accepted a clerkship in a mercantile house, which owed some obligations to his father. At the end of a couple of years he was sent to reside in South America ; and his parting words to his mother were—'When you see me again, Cheveleigh shall be yours.'

'Oh, my boy, take care. Remember, "They that haste to be rich shall not be innocent."

That was the last time she had seen Oliver.

Her great object was to maintain herself independently and to complete Henry's education as a gentleman. With this view she took up her abode in the least eligible of her houses at Northwold, and, dropping the aristocratic name which alone remained of her heiress-ship, opened a school for little boys,

declaring that she was rejoiced to recall the days when Henry and Oliver wore frocks and learnt to spell. If any human being could sweeten the Latin Grammar, it was Mrs. Frost; with the motherliness of a dame, and the refinement of a lady, unfailing sympathy and buoyant spirits; she loved each urchin, and each urchin loved her, till she had become a sort of adopted grandmamma to all Northwold and the neighbourhood.

Henry went to Oxford. He gained no scholarship, took no honours, but he fell neither into debt nor disgrace; he led a good-natured easy life, and made a vast number of friends; and when he was not staying with them, he and his mother were supremely happy together. He walked with her, read to her, sang to her, and played with her pupils. He had always been brought up as the heir—petted, humoured, and waited on—a post which he filled with good-humoured easy grace, and which he continued to fill in the same manner, though he had no one to wait on him but his mother and her faithful servant Jane Beckett. Years passed on, and they seemed perfectly satisfied with their division of labour,—Mrs. Frost kept school, and Henry played the flute, or shot over the Ormersfield property.

If any one remonstrated, Henry was always said to be waiting for a government appointment, which was to be procured by the Ormersfield interest. More for the sake of his mother than of himself, the Ormersfield interest was at length exerted, and the appointment was conferred on him. The immediate consequence was his marriage with the first pretty girl he met, poorer than himself, and all the Ormersfield interest failed to make his mother angry with him.

The cholera of 1832 put an end to poor Henry's desultory life. His house, in a crowded part of London, was especially doomed by the deadly sickness; and out of the whole family the sole survivors were a little girl of ten months old, and a boy of seven years, the latter of whom was with his grandmother at Northwold.

Mrs. Frost was one of the women of whom affection makes unconscious heroines. She could never sink, as long as there was aught to need her love and care; and though Henry had been her darling, the very knowledge that his orphans had no one but herself to depend on, seemed to brace her energies with fresh life. They were left entirely on her hands, her son Oliver made no offers of assistance. He had risen, so as to be a prosperous merchant at Lima, and he wrote with regularity and dutifulness, but he had never proposed coming to England, and did not proffer any aid in the charge of his brother's children. If she had expected anything from him, she did not say so; she seldom spoke of him, but never without tenderness, and usually as her 'poor Oliver,' and she abstained from teaching her grandchildren either to look to their rich uncle or to mourn over their lost inheritance. Cheveleigh was a winter evening's romance with no one but Jane Beckett; and the grandmother

always answered the children's inquiries by bidding them prove their ancient blood by resolute independence, and by that true dignity which wealth could neither give nor take away.

Of that dignity, Mrs. Frost was a perfect model. A singular compound of the gentle and the lofty, of tenderness and independence, she had never ceased to be the Northwold standard of the 'real lady'; too mild and gracious to be regarded as proud and poor, and yet too dignified for any liberty to be attempted, her only fault, that touch of pride, so ladylike and refined that it was kept out of sight, and never offended; and everything else so sweet and winning that there was scarcely a being who did not love, as well as honour her, for the cheerfulness and resignation that had borne her through her many trials. Her trustful spirit and warm heart had been an elixir of youth, and had preserved her freshness and elasticity long after her sister and brother-in-law at Ormersfield had grown aged and sunk into the grave, and even her nephew was fast verging upon more than middle age.

CHAPTER III

LOUIS LE DEBONNAIRE

I walked by his garden and saw the wild briar,
The thorn and the thistle grow broader and higher.—ISAAC WATTS

ORMERSFIELD PARK was extensive, ranging into fine broken ground, rocky and overgrown with brushwood; but it bore the marks of retrenchment; there was hardly a large timber tree on the estate, enclosures had been begun and deserted, and the deer had been sold off to make room for farmers' cattle, which grazed up to the very front door.

The house was of the stately era of Anne, with a heavy portico and clumsy pediment on the garden side, all the windows of the suite of rooms opening on a broad stone terrace, whence steps descended to the lawn, neatly kept, but sombre, for want of openings in the surrounding evergreens.

It was early March, and a lady wrapped in a shawl was seated on the terrace, enjoying the mild gleam of spring, and the freshness of the sun-warmed air, which awoke a smile of welcome as it breathed on her faded cheek, and her eyes gazed on the scene, in fond recognition.

It had been the home of Mrs. Ponsonby's childhood; and the slopes of turf and belts of dark ilex were fraught with many a recollection of girlish musings, youthful visions, and later, intervals of tranquillity and repose. After fourteen years spent in South America, how many threads she had to take up again!

She had been as a sister to her cousin, Lord Ormersfield, and had shared more of his confidence than any other person during

their earlier years, but afterwards their intercourse had necessarily been confined to brief and guarded letters. She had found him unchanged in his kindness to herself, and she was the more led to ponder on the grave, stern impassiveness of his manner to others, and to try to understand the tone of mind that it indicated.

She recalled him as he had been in his first youth—reserved, sensible, thoughtful, but with the fire of ambition burning strongly within, and ever and anon flashing forth vividly, repressed at once as too demonstrative, but filling her with enthusiastic admiration. She remembered him calmly and manfully meeting the shock of the failure, that would, he knew, fetter and encumber him through life—how resolutely he had faced the difficulties, how unselfishly he had put himself out of the question, how uprightly he had dealt by the creditors, how considerately by his father and aunt, how wise and moderate his proceedings had been throughout. She recollected how she had shared his aspirations, and gloried in his consistent and prudent course, without perceiving what sorrow had since taught her—that ambition was to him what pleasure was to other young men. What had it not been to her when that ambition began to be gratified! when he had become a leading man in Parliament, and by and by held office.

There, a change came over the spirit of her dream; and though she sighed, she could not but smile at the fair picture that rose before her, of a young girl of radiant loveliness, her golden curls drooping over her neck, and her eyes blue as the starry veronica by the hedge-side, smiling in the sunshine. She thought of the glances of proud delight that her cousin had stolen at her, to read in her face, that his Louisa was more than all he had told her. Little was needed to make her love the sweet, caressing young creature who had thrown her arms round her, and told her that she saw it was all nonsense to tell her she was such a good, grave, dreadful Cousin Mary! Yet there had been some few misgivings! So short an acquaintance! Her cousin too busy for more than being bewitched by the lovely face! The Villiers family, so gay and fashionable! Might not all have been foreseen? And yet, of what use would foresight have been? The gentleman was deeply attached, and the lady's family courted the match, the distinction he had won atoning for his encumbered fortune.

Other scenes arose on her memory—Louisa, a triumphant beauty, living on the homage she received, all brilliance, grace, and enjoyment. But there was a darkening background which grew more prominent. Poor Louisa had little wisdom by nature, and her education had been solely directed to enable her to shine in the world, not to render her fit for the companionship of a man of domestic tastes, accustomed to the society of superior women. There was nothing to fall back upon, nothing to make a home; she was listless and weary whenever

gaiety failed her—and he, disappointed and baffled, too unbending to draw her out, too much occupied to watch over her, yielded to her tastes, and let her pursue her favourite enjoyments unchecked.

A time had come when childish vanity and frivolity were verging on levity and imprudence. Expostulations fell powerless on her shallowness. Painful was the remembrance of the deprecating roguish glance of the beautiful eyes, and the coaxing caresses with which she kissed away the lecture, and made promises, only to forget them. She was like the soulless Undine, with her reckless gaiety and sweetness, so loving and childish that there was no being displeased with her, so innocent and devoid of all art or guile in her wilfulness, that her faults could hardly bear a harsher name than follies.

Again, Mrs. Ponsonby thought of the days when she herself had been left to stay with her old uncle and aunt in this very house while her husband was absent abroad, when she had assisted them to receive the poor young wife, sent home in failing health. She thought of the sad weeks, so melancholy in the impossibility of making an impression, or of leading poor Louisa from her frivolities; she recalled the sorrow of hearing her build on future schemes of pleasure, the dead blank when her prattle on them failed, the tedium of deeper subjects, and yet the bewitching sweetness overpowering all vexation at her exceeding silliness. Though full one-and-twenty years had passed, still the tears thrilled warm into Mrs. Ponsonby's eyes at the thought of Louisa's fond clinging to her, in spite of many an admonition and even exertion of authority, for she alone dared to control the spoilt child's self-will; and had far more power than the husband, who seemed to act as a check and restraint, and whose presence rendered her no longer easy and natural. One confidence had explained the whole.

'You know, Mary dear, I always was so much afraid of him! If I had had my own way, I know who it would have been; but there were mamma and Anna Maria always saying how fortunate I was, and that he would be Prime Minister, and all the rest. Oh! I was far too young and foolish for him. He should have married a sober body, such as you, Mary! Why did he not?' She wished she had never teased him by going out so much, and letting people talk nonsense; he had been very kind, and she was not half good enough for him. That confession, made to him, would have been balm for ever; but she had not resolution for the effort, and the days slid away till the worst fears were fulfilled. Nay, were they the *worst* fears? Was there not an unavowed sense that it was safer that she should die, while innocent of all but wayward folly, than be left to perils which she was so little able to resist?

The iron expression of grief on her husband's face had forbidden all sympathy, all attempt at consolation. He had returned at once to his business in London, there to find that

poor Louisa's extravagance had equalled her folly, and that he, whose pride it had been to redeem his paternal property, was thrown back by heavy debts on his own account. This had been known to Mrs. Ponsonby, but by no word from him; he had never permitted the most distant reference to his wife, and yet, with inconsistency betraying his passionate love, he had ordered one of the most beautiful and costly monuments that art could execute, for her grave at Ormersfield, and had sent brief but explicit orders that, contrary to all family precedent, his infant should bear no name but Louis.

On this child Mrs. Ponsonby had founded all her hopes of a renewal of happiness for her cousin; but when she had left England there had been little amalgamation between the volatile animated boy, and his grave unbending father. She could not conjure up any more comfortable picture of them than the child uneasily perched on his papa's knee, looking wistfully for a way of escape, and his father with an air of having lifted him up as a duty, without knowing what to do with him or to say to him.

At her earnest advice, the little fellow had been placed as a boarder with his great-aunt, Mrs. Frost, when his grandmother's death had deprived him of all that was homelike at Ormersfield. He had been with her till he was old enough for a public school, and she spoke of him as if he were no less dear to her than her own grandchildren; but she was one who saw no fault in those whom she loved, and Mrs. Ponsonby had been rendered a little anxious by a certain tone of dissatisfaction in Lord Ormersfield's curt mention of his son, and above all by his cold manner of announcing that this was the day when he would return from Oxford for the Easter vacation.

Could it be that the son was unworthy, or had the father's feelings been too much chilled ever to warm again, and all home affections lost in the strife of politics? These had ever since engaged him, whether in or out of office, leaving little time for society or for any domestic pursuit.

Her reflections were interrupted by a call of 'Mamma!' and her daughter came running up the steps. Mary Ponsonby had too wide a face for beauty, and not slightness enough for symmetry, but nothing could be more pleasing and trustworthy than the open countenance, the steady, clear, greenish-brown eyes, the kind, sensible mouth, the firm chin, broad though rather short forehead, and healthy though not highly-coloured cheek; and the voice—full, soft, and cheerful—well agreed with the expression, and always brought gladness and promise of sympathy.

'See, mamma, what we have found for you.'

'Violets! The very purple ones that used to grow on the orchard bank!'

'So they did. Mary knew exactly where to look for them,' said Mrs. Frost, who had followed her up the steps.

'And there is Gervas,' continued Mary; 'so charmed to hear of you, that we had almost brought him to see you.'

Mrs. Ponsonby declared herself so much invigorated by Ormersfield air, that she would go to see her old friend the gardener. Mary hurried to fetch her bonnet, and returned while a panegyric was going on upon her abilities as maid-of-all-work, in her mother's difficulties with male housemaids—black and brown—and washerwomen who rode on horseback in white satin shoes. She looked as if it were hardly natural that any one but herself should support her mother, when Mrs. Frost tenderly drew Mrs. Ponsonby's arm into her own; and it was indeed strange to see the younger lady so frail and broken, and the elder so strong, vigorous, and active; as they moved along in the sunshine, pausing to note each spring blossom that bordered the gravel, and entered the walled kitchen-garden, where espaliers ran parallel with the walks, dividing the vegetables from the narrow flower-beds, illuminated by crocuses opening the depths of their golden hearts to the sunbeams and the revelling bees. Old Gervas, in a patriarchal red waistcoat, welcomed Mrs. Ponsonby with more warmth than flattery. 'Bless me, ma'am, I'm right glad to see you; but how old you be!'

'I must come home to learn how to grow young, Gervas,' said she, smiling; 'I hear Betty is as youthful as my aunt here.'

'Ay, ma'am, Betty do fight it out tolerablisth,' was the reply to this compliment.

'Why, Gervas, what's all that wilderness? Surely those used to be strawberry beds.'

'Yes, ma'am, the earliest hautboys; don't ye mind? My young lord came and begged it of me, and, bless the lad, I can't refuse him nothing.'

'He seems to be no gardener!'

'He said he wanted to make a Botany Bay sort of garden,' said the old man; 'and sure enough 'tis a garden of weeds he's made of it, and mine into the bargain! He has a great big thistle here, and the down blows right over my beds, thick as snow, so that it is three women's work to be a match for the weeds; but speak to him of pulling it up, ye'd think 'twas the heart out of him.'

'Does he ever work here?'

'At first it was nought else; he and that young chap, Madison, always bringing docks and darnel out of the hedges, and plants from the nursery gardens, and bringing rockwork, and letting water in to make a swamp. There's no saying what's in the lad's head! But, of late, he's not done much but by times lying on the bank, reading or speaking verses out loud to himself, or getting young Madison off his work to listen to him. Once he got me to hear; but, ma'am, 'twas all about fairies and such like, putting an ass's head on an honest body as had lost his way. I told him 'twas no good for him or the boy to read such stuff, and I'd ha' none of it; but, if he chose to read me some

good book, he'd be welcome—for the candles bain't so good as they used, and I can't get no spectacles to suit me.'

'And did he read to you?'

'A bit or two, ma'am, if the humour took him. But he's young, you see, ma'am. I'm right glad he'll find you here. My old woman says he do want a lady about the place to make him comfortable like.'

'And who is this young Madison?' asked Mrs. Ponsonby, when they had turned from the old gardener.

'To hear Jem, you would believe that he is the most promising plant rearing for Botany Bay!' said Mrs. Frost. 'He is a boy from that wild place Marksedge, whom Louis took interest in, and made more familiar than Jem liked, or than, perhaps, was good for him. It did not answer; the servants did not like it, and it ended in his being sent to work with Smith, the ironmonger. Poor Louis! he took it sadly to heart, for he had taken great pains with the boy.'

'I like to hear the old name, Louis!'

'I can't help it,' said Mrs. Frost. 'He must be his old Aunt Kitty's Louis le Debonnaire! Don't you remember your calling him so when he was a baby?'

'Oh yes, it has exactly recalled to me the sort of gracious look that he used to have—half sly, half sweet—and so very pretty!'

'It suits him as well now. He is the kind of being who must have a pet name;' and Mrs. Frost, hoping he might be already arrived, could hardly slacken her eager step so as to keep pace with her niece's feeble movements. She was disappointed; the carriage had returned without Lord Fitzjocelyn. His hat and luggage were come, but he himself was missing. Mrs. Frost was very uneasy, but his father silenced conjectures by saying, that it was his usual way, and he would make his appearance before the evening. He would not send to meet another train, saying, that the penalty of irregularity must be borne, and the horses should not suffer for such freaks; and he would fain have been utterly indifferent, but he was evidently listening to every sound, and betrayed his anxiety by the decision with which he checked all expression of his aunt's fears.

There was no arrival all that evening, no explanation in the morning; and Betty Gervas, whom Mary went to visit in the course of the day, began to wonder whether the young lord could be gone for a soldier—the usual fate of all missing village lads.

Mary was on her way home, through the park, along a path skirting the top of a wooded ravine, a dashing rivulet making a pleasant murmur among the rocks below, and glancing here and there through the brushwood that clothed the precipitous banks, when, with a sudden rustling and crackling, a man leaped upon the path with a stone in each hand.

Mary started, but she did not lose her presence of mind, and

her next glance showed her that the apparition was not alarming, and was nearly as much amazed as herself. It was a tall slight young man, in a suit of shepherd's plaid, with a fair face and graceful agile form, recalling the word *debonnaire* as she had yesterday heard it applied. In instant conviction that this was the truant, she put out her hand by the same impulse that lighted his features with a smile of welcome, and the years of separation seemed annihilated as he exclaimed, 'My cousin Mary!' and grasped her hand, adding, 'I hope I did not frighten you—'

'Oh no; but where did you come from?'

'Up a hill perpendicular, like Hotspur,' he replied, in soft low quiet tones, which were a strange contrast to the words. 'No, see here,' and parting the bushes he showed some rude steps, half nature, half art, leading between the ferns and mountain-ash, and looking very inviting.

'How delightful!' cried Mary.

'I am glad you appreciate it,' he exclaimed; 'I will finish it off now, and put a rail. I did not care to go on when I had lost the poor fellow who helped me, but it saves a world of distance.'

'It must be very pretty amongst those beautiful ferns!'

'You can't conceive anything more charming,' he continued, with the same low distinct utterance, but an earnestness that almost took away her breath. 'There are nine ferns on this bank—that is, if we have the *Scolopendrium lævigatum*, as I am persuaded. Do you know anything of ferns? Ah! you come from the land of tree ferns.'

'Oh! I am so glad to exchange them for our home flowers. Primroses look so friendly and natural.'

'These rocks are perfect nests for them, and they even overhang the river. This is the best bit of the stream, so rapid and foaming that I must throw a bridge across for Aunt Catharine. Which would be most appropriate? I was weighing it as I came up—a simple stone, or a rustic performance in wood?'

'I should like stone,' said Mary, amused by his eagerness.

'A rough Druidical stone! That's it! The idea of rude negligent strength accords with such places, and this is a stone country. I know the very stone! Do come down and see!'

'To-morrow, if you please,' said Mary. 'Mamma must want me, and—but I suppose they know of your return at home.'

'No, they don't. They have learnt by experience that the right time is the one never to expect me.'

Mary's eyes were all astonishment, as she said, between wonder and reproof, 'Is that on purpose?'

'Adventures are thrust on some people,' was the nonchalant reply, with shoulders depressed, and a twinkle of the eye, as if he purposed amazing his auditor.

'I hope you have had an adventure, for nothing else could justify you,' said Mary, with some humour, but more gravity.

'Only a stray infant-errant, cast on my mercy at the junction station. Nurse, between eating and gossiping left behind—bell rings—engine squeaks—train starts—Fitzjocelyn and infant *vis-d-vis*.'

'You don't mean a baby?'

'A child of five years old, who soon ceased howling, and confided his history to me. He had been visiting grandmamma in London, and was going home to Illershall; so I found the best plan would be to leave the train at the next station, and take him home.'

'Oh, that was quite another thing,' exclaimed Mary, gratified at being able to like him. 'Could you find his home?'

'Yes; he knew his name and address too well to be lost or mislaid. I would have come home as soon as I had seen him in at the door; but the whole family rushed out on me, and conjured me first to dine and then to sleep. They are capital people. Dobbs is superintendent of the copper and tin works—a thoroughly right-minded man, with a nice, ladylike wife, the right sort of sound stuff that old England's heart is made of. It was worth anything to have seen it! They do incalculable good with their work-people. I saw the whole concern.'

He launched into an explanation of the process, producing from his pocket, papers of the ore, in every stage of manufacture, and twisting them up so carelessly, that they would have become a mass of confusion, had not Mary undertaken the repacking.

As they approached the house, the library window was thrown up, and Mrs. Frost came hurrying down with outstretched arms. She was met by her young nephew with an overflow of fond affection, before he looked up and beheld his father standing upright and motionless on the highest step. His excuses were made more lightly and easily than seemed to suit such rigid looks; but Lord Ormersfield bent his head as if resigning himself perforce to the explanation, and, with the softened voice in which he always spoke to Mrs. Ponsonby, said, 'Here he is—Louis, you remember your cousin.'

She was positively startled; for it was as if his mother's deep blue eyes were raised to hers, and there were the same regular, delicate features, fair, transparent complexion, and glossy light-brown hair tinted with gold—the same careless yet deprecating glance, the same engaging smile that warmed her heart to him at once, in spite of an air which was not that of wisdom.

'How little altered you are!' she exclaimed. 'If you were not taller than your father, I should say you were the same Louis that I left fourteen years ago.'

'I fear that is the chief change,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'A boy that would be a boy all his life, like Sir Thomas More's son!' said Louis, coolly and simply, but with a twinkle in the corner of his eye, as if he said it on purpose to be provoking;

and Mrs. Frost interposed by asking where the cousins had met, and whether they had known each other.

‘I knew him by what you said yesterday,’ said Mary.

‘Louis le Debonnaire?’ asked Mrs. Frost, smiling.

‘No, Mary; not that name!’ he exclaimed. ‘It is what Jem calls me, when he has nothing more cutting to say—’

‘Aye, because it is exactly what you look when you know you deserve a scolding—with your shoulders pulled down, and your face made up!’ said his aunt, patting him.

When Mrs. Ponsonby and Mary had left the room to dress, Louis exclaimed, ‘And that is Mrs. Ponsonby! How ill she does look! Her very voice has broken down, though it still has the sweet sound that I could never forget! Has she had advice?’

‘Dr. Hastings saw her in London,’ said his father. ‘He sent her into the country at once, and thinks that there is fair hope that complete rest of spirits may check the disease.’

‘Will she stay here?’ said Louis, eagerly. ‘That would be like old times, and we could make her very comfortable. I would train those two ponies for her drives—’

‘I wish she would remain here,’ said his father; ‘but she is bent on becoming my aunt’s tenant.’

‘Ha! That is next best! They could do nothing more commendable. Will they be a windfall for the House Beautiful?’

‘No,’ said Mrs. Frost. ‘They wish to have a house of their own, in case Mr. Ponsonby should come home, or Miss Ponsonby to stay with them.’

‘The respected aunt who brought Mary up? How long has she been at Lima?’

‘Four years.’

‘Four years! She has not made use of her opportunities! Alas for the illusion dispelled! The Spanish walk and mantilla melt away; and behold! the primitive wide-mouthed body of fourteen years since!’

Mrs. Frost laughed, but it seemed to be a serious matter with Lord Ormersfield. ‘If you could appreciate sterling worth,’ he said, ‘you would be ashamed to speak of your cousin with such conceited disrespect.’

All the effect was to make Louis walk quietly out of the room; but his shoulder and eyebrow made a secret telegraph of amazement to Mrs. Frost.

The new arrival seemed to have put the Earl into a state of constant restless anxiety, subdued and concealed with a high hand, but still visible to one who knew him so intimately as did Mrs. Ponsonby. She saw that he watched each word and gesture, and studied her looks to judge of the opinion they might create in her. Now the process was much like weighing and balancing the down of Fitzjocelyn’s own favourite thistle; the profusion, the unsubstantiality, and the volatility being far too similar; and there was something positively sad in the solicitous heed taken of such utter heedlessness.

The reigning idea was the expedition to Illershall, and the excellent condition of the work-people under his new friend, the superintendent. Forgetful that mines were a tender subject, the eager speaker became certain that copper must exist in the neighbourhood, and what an employment it would afford to all the country round. 'Marksedge must be the very place; the soil promises metallic veins, the discovery would be the utmost boon to the people. It would lead to industry and civilization, and counteract all the evils we have brought on them. Mary, do you remember Marksedge, the place of exile?'

'Not that I know of.'

'No; we were too young to understand the iniquity. In the last generation, it was not the plan to stone Naboth, but to remove him. Great people could not endure little people; so, by way of kindness, our whole population of Ormersfield, except a few necessary retainers, were transported bodily from betwixt the wind and our nobility, located on a moor beyond our confines, a generous gift to the poor-rates of Bletchynden, away from church, away from work, away from superintendence, away from all amenities of the poor man's life!'

This was one of the improvements to which Mr. Dynevor had prompted the late Earl; but Louis did not know whom he was cutting as he uttered this tirade, with a glow on his cheek and eye, but with his usual soft, modulated intonation and polished language, the distinctness and deliberation taking off all air of rattle, and rendering his words more impressive.

'Indeed! is there much distress at Marksedge?' said Mrs. Ponsonby.

'They have gifts with our own poor at Christmas,' said Lord Ormersfield; 'but they are a defiant, ungrateful set, always in distress by their own fault.'

'What cause have they for gratitude?' exclaimed his son. 'For being turned out of house and home? for the three miles' walk to their daily work? Yes, it is the fact. The dozen families left here, with edicts against lodgers, cannot suffice for the farmer's work; and all Norris's and Beecher's men have to walk six miles every day of their lives, besides the hard day's work. They are still farther from their parish, they are no one's charge, they have neither church nor school, and whom should we blame for their being lawless?'

'It used to be thought a very good thing for the parish,' said Mrs. Frost, looking at her niece. 'I remember being sorry for the poor people, but we did not see things in the light in which Louis puts it.'

'Young men like to find fault with the doings of their elders,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'Nothing can make me regard it otherwise than as a wicked sin!' said Louis.

'Nay, my dear,' mildly said Aunt Catharine, 'if it were mistaken, I am sure it was not intentionally cruel.'

‘What I call wicked, is to sacrifice the welfare of dependents to our own selfish convenience! And you would call it cruel too, Aunt Catharine, if you could hear the poor creatures beg as a favour of Mr. Holdsworth to be buried among their kin, and know how it has preyed on the minds of the dying that they might not lie here among their own people.’

‘Change the subject, Fitzjocelyn,’ said his father: ‘the thing is done, and cannot be undone.’

‘The undoing is my daily thought,’ said Louis. ‘If I could have tried my plan of weaving cordage out of cotton-grass and thistle-down, I think I could have contrived for them.’

Mary looked up, and met his merry blue eye. Was he saying it so gravely to try whether he could take her in? ‘If you could—’ she said, and he went off into a hearty laugh, and finished by saying, so that no one could guess whether it was sport or earnest, ‘Even taking into account the depredations of the goldfinches, it would be an admirable speculation, and would confer immeasurable benefits on the owners of waste lands. I mean to take out a patent when I have succeeded in the spinning.’

‘A patent for a donkey,’ whispered Aunt Catharine. He responded with a deferential bow, and the conversation was changed by the Earl; but copper was still the subject uppermost with Louis, and no sooner was dinner over than he followed the ladies to the library, and began searching every book on metals and minerals, till he had heaped up a pile of volumes, whence he rang the changes on oxide, pyrites, and carbonate, and octohedron crystals—names which poor Mrs. Frost had heard but too often. At last it came to certainty that he had seen the very masses containing ore; he would send one to-morrow to Illershall to be analyzed, and bring his friend Dobbs down to view the spot.

‘Not in my time,’ interposed Lord Ormersfield. ‘I would not wish for a greater misfortune than the discovery of a mine on my property.’

‘No wonder,’ thought Mrs. Ponsonby, as she recollected Wheal Salamanca and Wheal Catharine, and Wheal Dynevor, and all the other wheals that had wheeled away all Cheveleigh and half Ormersfield, till the last unfortunate wheal failed when the rope broke, and there were no funds to buy a new one. No wonder Lord Ormersfield trembled when he heard his son launch out into those easily-ascending conjectural calculations, freely working sums in his head, so exactly like the old Earl, his grandfather, that she could have laughed, but for sympathy with the father, and anxiety to see how the son would take the damp so vexatiously cast on his projects.

He made the gesture that Mrs. Frost called *debonnaire*—read on for five minutes in silence, insisted on teaching his aunt the cause of the colours in peacock ores, compared them to a pigeon’s neck, and talked of old Betty Gervas’s tame pigeons;

whence he proceeded to memories of the days that he and Mary had spent together, and asked which of their old haunts she had revisited. Had she been into the nursery?

'Oh yes! but I wondered you had sent the old walnut press into that lumber-room.'

'Is that satire?' said Louis, starting and looking in her face.

'I don't know what you mean.'

'I have a better right to ask what you mean by stigmatizing my apartment as a lumber-room?'

'It was only what I saw from the door,' said Mary, a little confused, but rallying and answering with spirit; 'and I must maintain that, if you mean the room over the garden entrance, it is very like a lumber-room.'

'Ah, Mary! you have not outgrown the delusions of your sex. Is an Englishman's house his castle while housemaids maraud over it, ransacking his possessions, irritating poor peaceful dust that only wants to be let alone, sweeping away cherished cobwebs?'

'Oh, if you cherish cobwebs!' said Mary.

'Did not the fortunes of Scotland hang on a spider's thread? Did not a cobweb save the life of Mahomet, or Ali, or a mediæval saint—no matter which? Was not a spider the solace of the Bastille? Have not I lain for hours on a summer morning watching the tremulous lines of the beautiful geometrical composition?'

'More shame for you!' said Mary, with a sort of dry humorous bluntness.

'The very answer you would have made in old times,' cried Louis, delighted. 'O Mary, you bring me back the days of my youth! You never would see the giant who used to live in that press!'

'I remember our great fall from the top of it.'

'Oh yes!' cried Louis; 'Jem Frost had set us up there bolt upright for sentries, and I saw the enemies too soon, when you would not allow that they were there. I was going to fire my musket at them; but you used violence to keep me steady to my duty—pulled my hair, did not you?'

'I know you scratched me, and we both rolled off together! I wonder we were not both killed!'

'That did not trouble Jem! He picked us up, and ordered us into arrest under the bed for breach of discipline.'

'I fear Jem was a martinet,' said Mrs. Frost.

'That he was! A general formed on the model of him who, not contented with assaulting a *demi-lune*, had taken *une lune toute entière*. We had a siege of the Fort Bombadero, inaccessible, and with mortars firing double-hand grenades. They were dandelion clocks, and there were nettles to act the part of poisoned spikes on the breach.'

'I remember the nettles,' said Mary, 'and Jem's driving you to gather them; you standing with your bare legs in the nettle-bed, when he *would* make me dig, and I could not come to help you!'

On duty in the trenches. Your sense of duty was exemplary. I remember your digging on, like a very Casabianca, all alone, in the midst of a thunderstorm, because Jem had forgotten to call you in, crying all the time with fear of the lightning !'

'You came to help me,' said Mary. 'You came rushing out from the nursery to my rescue !'

'I could not make you stir. We were taken prisoners by a sally from the nursery. For once in your life, you were in disgrace !'

'I quite thought I ought to mind Jem,' said Mary, 'and never knew whether it was play or earnest.'

'Only so could you transgress,' said Louis,—'you who never cried, except as my amateur Mungo Malagrowth. Poor Mary ! what an amazement it was to me to find you breaking your heart over the utmost penalties of the nursery law, when to me they only afforded agreeable occasions of showing that I did not care ! I must have been intolerable till you and Mrs. Ponsonby took me in hand !'

'I am glad you own your obligations,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'I own myself as much obliged to Mary for making me wise, as to Jem for making me foolish.'

'It is not the cause of gratitude I should have expected,' said his father.

'Alas ! if he and Clara were but here !' sighed Louis. 'I entreated him in terms that might have moved a pyramid from its base, but the Frost was arctic. An iceberg will move, but he is past all melting !'

'I respect his steadiness of purpose,' said the Earl ; 'I know no young man whom I honour more than James.'

His aunt and his son were looking towards each other with glistening eyes of triumph and congratulation, and Mrs. Frost cleared her voice to say that he was making far too much of her Jemmy ; a very good boy, to be sure, but if he said so much of him, the Marys would be disappointed to see nothing but a little fiery Welshman.

CHAPTER IV

THISTLE-DOWN

Lightly soars the thistle-down,
 Lightly does it float—
 Lightly seeds of care are sown,
 Little do we note.
 Watch life's thistles bud and blow,
 Oh, 'tis pleasant folly ;
 But when all life's paths they strew,
 Then comes melancholy.—MARY HOWITT

MARY PONSONBY had led a life of change and wandering that had given her few local attachments. The period she had spent at Ormersfield, when she was from five to seven years old, had

been the most joyous part of her life, and had given her a strong feeling for the place where she had lived with her mother, and in an atmosphere of affection, free from the shadow of that skeleton in the house, which had darkened her childhood more than she understood.

The great weakness of Mrs. Ponsonby's life had been her over-hasty acceptance of a man whom she did not thoroughly know, because her delicacy had taken alarm at foolish gossip about herself and her cousin. It was a folly that had been severely visited. Irreligious himself, Mr. Ponsonby disliked his wife's strictness; he resented her affection for her own family, gave way to dissipated habits, and made her miserable both by violence and neglect. Born late of this unhappy marriage, little Mary was his only substantial link to his wife, and he had never been wanting in tenderness to her: but many a storm had raged over the poor child's head; and, though she did not know why the kind old Countess had come to remove her and her mother, and 'papa' was still a loved and honoured title, she was fully sensible of the calm security at Ormersfield.

When Mr. Ponsonby had recalled his wife on his appointment at Lima, Mary had been left in England for education, under the charge of his sister in London. Miss Ponsonby was good and kind, but of narrow views, thinking all titled people fashionable, and all fashionable people reprobate, jealous of her sister-in-law's love for her own family, and, though unable to believe her brother blameless, holding it as an axiom that married people could not fall out without faults on both sides, and charging a large share of their unhappiness on the house of Fitzjocelyn. Principle had prevented her from endeavouring to weaken the little girl's affection to her mother; but it had been her great object to train her up in habits of sober judgment, and freedom from all the romance, poetry, and enthusiasm which she fancied had been injurious to Mrs. Ponsonby. The soil was of the very kind that she would have chosen. Mary was intelligent, but with more sense than fancy, more practical than intellectual, and preferring the homely to the tasteful. At school, study and accomplishments were mere tasks; her recreation was found in acts of kindness to her companions, and her hopes were all fixed on the going out to Peru, to be useful to her father and mother. At seventeen she went; full of active, housewifely habits, with a clear head, sound heart, and cramped mind; her spirits even and cheerful, but not high nor mirthful, after ten years of evenings spent in needlework beside a dry maiden aunt.

Nor was the home she found at Lima likely to foster the joyousness of early girlhood. Mr. Ponsonby was excessively fond of her; but his affection to her only marked, by contrast, the gulf between him and her mother. There was no longer any open misconduct on his part, and Mrs. Ponsonby was almost tremblingly attentive to his wishes; but he was chill and sarcastic in his manner towards her, and her nervous attacks often

betrayed that she had been made to suffer in private for differences of opinion. Health and spirits were breaking down ; and, though she never uttered a word of complaint, the sight of her sufferings was trying for a warm-hearted young girl.

Mary's refuge was hearty affection to both parents. She would not reason nor notice where filial tact taught her that it was best to be ignorant ; she charged all *tracasseries* on the Peruvian republic, and set herself simply to ameliorate each vexation as it arose, and divert attention from it without generalizing, even to herself, on the state of the family. The English comfort which she brought into the Limenian household was one element of peace ; and her brisk, energetic habits produced an air of ease and pleasantness that did much to make home agreeable to her father, and removed many cares which oppressed her mother. To her, Mary was all the world—daughter, comforter, friend, and nurse, unfailing in deeds of love or words of cheer, and removing all sense of dreariness and solitude. And Mary had found her mother all, and more than all she remembered, and admired and loved her with a deep, quiet glow of intense affection. There was so much call for Mary's actual exertion of various kinds, that there was little opportunity for cultivating or enlarging her mind by books, though the scenes and circumstances around her could not but take some effect. Still, at twenty-one she was so much what she had been at seventeen—so staid, sensible, and practical—that Miss Ponsonby gladly pronounced her not in the least spoilt.

Fain would her aunt have kept both her and her mother as her guests ; but Mrs. Ponsonby had permission to choose whatever residence best suited her, and felt that Bryanston-square and Miss Ponsonby would be fatal to her harassed spirits. She yearned after the home and companions of her youth, and Miss Ponsonby could only look severe, talk of London doctors, and take Mary aside to warn her against temptations from fashionable people.

Mary had been looking for the fashionable people ever since, and the first sign of them she had seen, was the air and figure of her cousin Fitzjocelyn. Probably good Aunt Melicent would distrust him ; and yet his odd startling talk, and the arch look of mischief in the corners of his mouth and eyes, had so much likeness to the little Louis of old times, that she could not look on him as a stranger nor as a formidable being ; but was always recurring to the almost monitorial sense of protection, with which she formerly used to regard him, when she shared his nursery.

Her mother had cultivated her love for Ormersfield, and she was charmed by her visits to old haunts, well remembering everything. She gladly recognized the little low-browed church, the dumpy tower, and graveyard rising so high that it seemed to intend to bury the church itself, and permitted many a view, through the lattices, of the seats, and the Fitzjocelyn hatchments and monuments.

She lingered after church on Sunday afternoon with Mrs. Frost to look at Lady Fitzjocelyn's monument. It was in the chancel, a recumbent figure in white marble, as if newly fallen asleep, and with the lovely features chiselled from a cast taken after death had fixed and ennobled their beauty.

'It is just like Louis's profile!' said Mrs. Frost, as they came out.

'Well,' said Louis, who was nearer than she was aware, 'I hope at least no one will make me the occasion of a lion when I am dead.'

'It is very beautiful,' said Mary.

'May be so; but the sentiment is destroyed by its having been six months in the Royal Academy, number 16,136, and by seeing it down among the excursions in the *Northwold Guide*.'

'Louis, my dear, you should not be satirical on this,' said Mrs. Frost.

'I never meant it,' said Louis; 'but I never could love that monument. It used to oppress me with a sense of having a white marble mother! And, seriously, it fills up the chancel as if it were its show-room, according to our family tradition that the church is dedicated to the Fitzjocelyns. Living or dead, we have taken it all to ourselves.'

'It was a very fair, respectable congregation,' said his aunt.

'Exactly so. That is my complaint. Everything belonging to his lordship is respectable—except his son.'

'Take care, Louis; here is Mary looking as if she would take you at your word.'

'Pray, Mary, do they let no one who is not respectable go to church in Peru?'

'I do not think you would change your congregation for the wretched crowds of brown beggars,' said Mary.

'Would I not?' cried Louis. 'Oh! if the analogous class here in England could but feel that the church was for them!—not driven out and thrust aside, by our respectability!'

'Marksedge to wit!' said a good-humoured voice, as Mr. Holdsworth, the young Vicar, appeared at his own wicket, with a hearty greeting. 'I never hear those words without knowing where you are, Fitzjocelyn.'

'I hope to be there literally some day this week,' said Louis. 'Will you walk with me? I want to ask old Madison how his grandson goes on. I missed going to see after the boy last time I was at home, and have been sorry for it ever since.'

'I fear he has not been going on well,' said the Vicar. 'His master told me that he found him very idle and saucy.'

'People of that sort never know how to speak to a lad,' said Louis. 'It is their own rating that they ought to blame.'

'Not Tom Madison, I know,' said Mr. Holdsworth, laughing. 'But I did not come out to combat that point, but to inquire after the commissions you kindly undertook.'

'I have brought you such a set of prizes! Red rubrics, red

margins; and for the apparatus, I have brought a globe with all the mountains in high relief;—yes, and an admirable physical atlas, and a box of instruments and models for applying mathematics to mechanics. We might give evening lectures, and interest the young farmers.'

'Pray,' said the Vicar, with a sound of dismay, 'where may the bill be? I thought the limits were two pounds eighteen.'

'Oh! I take all that on myself.'

'We shall see,' said Mr. Holdsworth, not gratefully. 'Was Origen sent home in time for you to bring?'

'There!' cried Louis, starting, 'Origen is lying on the very chair where I put him last January. I will write to Jem Frost to-morrow to send him to the binder.'

'Is it of any use to ask for the music?'

'I assure you, Mr. Holdsworth, I am very sorry. I'll write at once to Frost.'

'Then I am afraid the parish will not be reformed as you promised last Christmas,' said the Vicar, turning, with a smile, to Mrs. Frost. 'We were to be civilized by weekly concerts in the school.'

'What were you to play, Louis?' said Mrs. Frost, laughing.

'I was to imitate all the birds in the air at once,' said Louis, beginning to chirp like a *mêlée* of sparrows, turning it into the croak of a raven, and breaking off suddenly with, 'I beg your pardon—I forgot it was Sunday! Indeed, Mr. Holdsworth, I can say no more than that I was a wretch not to remember. Next time I'll write it all down in the top of my hat, with a pathetic entreaty that if my hat be stolen, the thief shall fulfil the commissions, and punctually send in the bill to the Rev. W. B. Holdsworth!'

'I shall hardly run the risk,' said Mr. Holdsworth, smiling, as he parted with them, and disappeared within his clipped yew hedges.

'Poor, ill-used Mr. Holdsworth!' cried Aunt Catharine.

'Yes, it was base to forget the binding of that book,' said Louis, gravely. 'I wish I knew what amends to make.'

'You owe amends far more for making a present of a commission. I used to do the like, to save myself trouble, till I came down in the world, and then I found it had been a mere *air de grand seigneur*.'

'I should not dare to serve you or Jem so; but I thought the school was impersonal, and could receive a favour.'

'It is no favour, unless you clearly define where the commission ended and the gift began. Careless benefits oblige no one.'

Fitzjocelyn received his aunt's scoldings very prettily. His manner to her was a becoming mixture of the chivalrous, the filial, and the playful. Mary watched it as a new and pretty picture. All his confidence, too, seemed to be hers; but who could help pouring out his heart to the ever-indulgent, sympathizing Aunt Catharine? It was evidently the greatest treat

to him to have her for his guest, and his attention to her extended even to the reading a sermon to her in the evening, to spare her eyes ; a measure so entirely after Aunt Melicent's heart, that Mary decided that even she would not think her cousin so hopelessly fashionable.

Good-natured he was, without doubt ; for as the three ladies were sitting down to a sociable morning of work and reading aloud, he came in to say he was going to see after Tom Madison, and to ask if there were any commands for Northwold, with his checked shooting-jacket pockets so puffed out that his aunt began patting and inquiring. 'Provisions for the House Beautiful,' he said, as forth came on the one side a long rough brown yam. 'I saw it at a shop in London,' he said, 'and thought the Faithfull sisters would like to be reminded of their West Indian feasts.' And, 'to make the balance true,' he had in the other pocket a lambswool shawl of gorgeous dyes, with wools to make the like, and the receipt, in what he called 'female algebra,' the long knitting-pins under his arm like a riding-whip. He explained that he thought it would be a winter's work for Miss Salome to imitate it, and that she would succour half-a-dozen families with the proceeds ; and Mrs. Ponsonby was pleased to hear him speak so affectionately of the two old maiden sisters. They were the nieces of an old gentleman to whom the central and handsomest house of Dynevior Terrace had been let. He had an annuity which had died with him, and they inherited very little but the furniture with which they had lived on in the same house, in hopes of lodgers, and paying rent to Mrs. Frost when they had any. There was a close friendship and perfect understanding between her and them, and, as she truly assured them, full and constant rent could hardly have done her as much good as their neighbourhood. Miss Mercy was the Sister of Charity of all Northwold ; Miss Salome, who was confined to her chair by a complaint in her knee, knitted and made fancy-works, the sale of which furnished funds for her charities. She was highly educated, and had a great knowledge of natural history. Fitzjocelyn had given their abode the name of the House Beautiful, as being redolent of the essence of the *Pilgrim's Progress* ; and the title was so fully accepted by their friends, that the very postman would soon know it. He lingered, discoursing on this topic, while Mary repacked his parcels, and his aunt gave him a message to Jane Beckett, to send the carpenter to No. 7 before Mary's visit of inspection ; but she prophesied that he would forget ; and, in fact, it was no good augury that he left the knitting-pins behind him on the table, and Mary was only just in time to catch him with them at the front door.

'Thank you, Mary—you are the universal memory,' he said. 'What rest you must give my father's methodical spirit ! I saw you pile up all those *Blackwoods* of mine this morning, just as he was going to fall upon them.'

'If you saw it, I should have expected you to do it yourself,' said Mary, in her quaint downright manner.

'Never expect me to do what is expected,' answered he.

'Do you do *that* because it is not expected?' said Mary, feeling almost as if he were beyond the pale of reason, as she saw him adjusting a plant of groundsel in his cap.

'It is for the dicky-bird at my aunt's. There's no lack of it at the Terrace; but it is an old habit, and there always was an illusion that Ormersfield groundsel is a superior article.'

'I suppose that is why you grow so much.'

'Are you a gardener? Some day we will go to work, clear the place, and separate the botanical from the intrusive!'

'I should like it, of all things!'

'I'll send the horse round to the stable, and begin at once!' exclaimed Louis, all eagerness; but Mary demurred, as she had promised to read to her mother and aunt some of their old favourites, Madame de Sévigné's letters, and his attention flew off to his restless steed, which he wanted her to admire.

'My Yeomanry charger,' he said. 'We turn out five troopers. I hope you will be here when we go out, for going round to Northwold brought me into a direful scrape when I went to exhibit myself to the dear old Terrace world. My father said it was an unworthy ambition. What would he have thought, if he had seen Jane stroking me down with the brush on the plea of dust, but really on the principle of stroking a dog! Good old Jane! Have you seen her yet? Has she talked to you about Master Oliver?'

The horse became so impatient, that Mary had no time for more than a monosyllable, before Louis was obliged to mount and ride off; and he was seen no more till just before dinner, when, with a shade of French *malice*, Mrs. Frost inquired about Jane and the carpenter: she had seen the cap, still decorated with groundsel, lying in the hall, and had a shrewd suspicion, but the answer went beyond her expectations—'Ah!' he said, 'it is all the effect of the Norman mania!'

'What have you been doing? What is the matter?' she cried, alarmed.

'The matter is not with me, but with the magistrates.'

'My dear Louis, don't look so very wise and capable, or I shall think it a very bad scrape indeed! Pray tell me what you have been about.'

'You know Sir Gilbert Brewster and Mr. Shoreland are rabid about the little brook between their estates, of which each wishes to arrogate to himself the exclusive fishing. Their keepers watch like the Austrian guard on the Danube, in a life of perpetual assault and battery. Last Saturday, March 3rd, 1847, one Benjamin Hodgekin, aged fifteen, had the misfortune to wash his feet in the debatable water; the belligerent powers made common cause, and haled the wretch before the Petty Sessions. His mother met me. She lived in service here till

she married a man at Marksedge, now dead. This poor boy is an admirable son, the main stay of the family, who must starve if he were imprisoned, and she declared, with tears in her eyes, that she could not bear for a child of hers to be sent to gaol, and begged me to speak to the gentlemen.' He started up with kindling eyes and vehement manner. 'I went to the Justice-room!'

'My dear! with the groundsel?'

'And the knitting-needles!'

On rushed the narration, unheeding trifles. 'There was the array:—Mr. Calcott in the chair, and old Freeman, and Captain Shaw, and fat Sir Gilbert, and all the rest, met to condemn this wretched widow's son for washing his feet in a gutter!'

'Pray what said the indictment?' asked Mrs. Ponsonby.

'Oh, that he had killed an infant trout of the value of three farthings! Three giant keepers made oath to it, but I had his own mother's word that he was washing his feet!'

No one could help laughing, but Fitzjocelyn was far past perceiving any such thing. 'Urge what I would, they fined him. I talked to old Brewster! I appealed to his generosity, if there be room for generosity about a trout no bigger than a gudgeon! I talked to Mr. Calcott, who, I thought, had more sense, but Justice Shallow would have been more practicable! No one took a rational view but Ramsbotham of the factory, a very sensible man, with excellent feeling. When it is recorded in history, who will believe that seven moral, well-meaning men agreed in condemning a poor lad of fifteen to a fine of five shillings, costs three-and-sixpence—a sum he could no more pay than I the National Debt, and with the alternative of three months' imprisonment, branding and contaminating for life, and destroying all self-respect? I paid the fine, so there is one act of destruction the less on the heads of the English squirearchy.'

'Act of destruction!'

'The worst destruction is to blast a man's character because the love of adventure is strong within him—!'

He was at this point when Lord Ormersfield entered, and after his daily civil ceremonious inquiries of the ladies whether they had walked or driven out, he turned to his son, saying, 'I met Mr. Calcott just now, and heard from him that he had been sorry to convict a person in whom you took interest; a lad from Marksedge. What did you know of him?'

'I was prompted by common justice and humanity,' said Louis. 'My protection was claimed for the poor boy, as the son of an old servant of ours.'

'Indeed! I think you must have been imposed on. Mr. Calcott spoke of the family as notorious poachers.'

'Find a poor fellow on the wong side of a hedge, and not a squire but will swear that he is a hardened ruffian!'

'Usually with reason,' said the Earl. 'Pray when did this person's parents allege that they had been in my service?'

'It was his mother. Her name was Blackett, and she left us on her marriage with one of the Hodgekins.'

Lord Ormersfield rang the bell, and Frampton, the butler and confidential servant, formed on his own model, made his appearance.

'Do you know whether a woman of the name of Blackett ever lived in service here?'

'Not that I am aware of, my lord. I will ascertain the fact.'

In a few moments Frampton returned. 'Yes, my lord, a girl named Blackett was once engaged to help in the scullery, but was discharged for dishonesty at the end of a month.'

'Did not Frampton know that that related to me?' said Louis, *sotto voce*, to his aunt. 'Did he not trust that he was reducing me from a sea-anemone to a lump of quaking jelly?'

So far from this consummation, Lord Fitzjocelyn looked as triumphant as Don Quixote liberating Gines de Pasamonte. He and his father might have sat for illustrations of

'Youth is full of pleasure,
Age is full of care,'

as they occupied the two ends of the dinner-table; the Earl concealing anxiety and vexation under more than ordinary punctilious politeness; the Viscount doing his share of the honours with easy, winning grace and attention, and rattling on in an undertone of lively conversation with Aunt Catharine. Mary was silently amazed at her encouraging him; but perhaps she could not help spoiling him the more, because there was a storm impending. At least, as soon as she was in the drawing-room, she became restless and nervous, and said that she wished his father could see that speaking sternly to him never did any good; besides, it was mere inconsiderateness, the excess of chivalrous compassion.

Mrs. Ponsonby said she thought young men's ardour more apt to be against than for the poacher.

'I must confess,' said Aunt Catharine, with all the reluctance of a high-spirited Dynevor,—'I must confess that Louis is no sportsman! He was eager about it once, till he had become a good shot; and then it lost all zest for him, and he prefers his own vagaries. He never takes a gun unless James drives him out; and, oddly enough, his father is quite vexed at his indifference, as if it were not manly. If his father would only understand him!'

The specimen of that day had almost made Mrs. Ponsonby fear that there was nothing to understand, and that only dear Aunt Kitty's affection could perceive anything but amiable folly; and it was not much better when the young gentleman reappeared, looking very *debonnaire*, and sitting down beside Mrs. Frost, said in a voice meant for her alone—'*Henry IV.*,

Part II., the insult to Chief Justice Gascoigne. My father will presently enter and address you :

“O, that it could be proved
That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
In cradle-cloths our children as they lay,—
Call'd yours Fitzjocelyn—mine, Frost Dynevor!”

‘For shame, Louis! I shall have to call you Fitzjocelyn! You are behaving very ill.’

‘Insulting the English constitution in the person of seven squires.’

‘Don’t, my dear! It was the very thing to vex your father that you should have put yourself in such a position.’

‘Bearding the Northwold bench with a groundsel plume and a knitting-needle :

“With a needle for a sword, and a thimble for a hat,
Wilt thou fight a traverse with the Castle cat?”

The proper champion in such a cause, since “What cat’s averse to fish?”

‘No, Louis, dear,’ said his aunt, struggling like a girl to keep her countenance; ‘this is no time for nonsense. One would think you had no feeling for your father.’

‘My dear aunt, I can’t go to gaol like Prince Hal. I do assure you, I did *not* assault the bench with the knitting-pins. What am I to do?’

‘Not set at nought your father’s displeasure.’

‘I can’t help it,’ said he, almost sadly, though half smiling. ‘What would become of me if I tried to support the full weight? Interfering with institutions, ruining reputation, blasting bulwarks, patronizing poachers, vituperating venerated—’

‘Quite true,’ cried Aunt Catharine, with spirit. ‘You *know* you had no business there, lecturing a set of men old enough to be your grandfathers, and talking them all to death, no doubt.’

‘Well, Aunt Kitty, if oppression maddens the wise, what must it do to the foolish?’

‘If you only allow that it was foolish—’

‘No; I had rather know whether it was wrong. I believe I was too eager, and not respectful enough to the old squire: and, on reflection, it might have been a matter of obedience to my father, not to interfere with the prejudices of true-born English magistrates. Yes, I was wrong: I would have owned it sooner, but for the shell he fired over my head. And for the rest, I don’t know how to repent of having protested against tyranny.’

There was something redeeming in the conclusion, and it was a comfort, for it was impossible to retain anger with one so gently, good-humouredly polite and attentive.

A practical answer to the champion was not long in coming. He volunteered the next day to walk to Northwold with Mrs. Frost and Mary, who wanted to spend the morning in selecting a house in Dynevor Terrace, and to be fetched home by and by,

when Mrs. Ponsonby took her airing. Two miles seemed nothing to Aunt Catharine, who accepted her nephew's arm for love, and not for need, as he discoursed of all the animals that might be naturalized in England, obtained from Mary an account of the llamas of the Andes, and rode off upon a scheme of an importation to make the fortune of Marksedge by a manufacture of alpaca umbrellas.

Meantime, he must show the beautiful American ducks which he hoped to naturalize on the pond near the keeper's lodge: but, whistle and call as he would, nothing showed itself but screaming Canada geese. He ran round, pulled out a boat half full of water, and, with a foot on each side, paddled across to a bushy island in the centre,—but in vain. The keeper's wife, who had the charge over them, came out: 'Oh, my lord, I am so sorry! They pretty ducks!'

'Ha! the foxes?'

'I wish it was, my lord; but it is they poachers out at Marksedge that are so daring, they would come anywheres—and you see the ducks would roost up in the trees, and you said I was not to shut 'em up at night. My master was out up by Beech hollow; I heard a gun, and looked out; I seen a man and a boy—I'd take my oath it was young Hodgekin. They do say Nanny Hodgekin, she as was one of the Blacketts, whose husband was transported, took in two ducks next morning to Northwold. Warren couldn't make nothing of it; but if ever he meets that Hodgekin again, he says he *shall* catch it!'

'Well, Mrs. Warren, it can't be helped—thank you for the good care you took of the poor ducks,' said Louis, kindly; and as he walked on through the gate, he gave a long sigh, and said, 'My dainty ducks! So there's an end of them, and all their tameness!' But the smile could not but return. 'It is lucky the case does not come before the bench! but really that woman deserves a medal for coolness!'

'I suppose,' said Mary, 'she could have paid the fine with the price of the ducks.'

'Ah! the beauties! I wish Mr. Hodgekin had fallen on the pheasants instead! However, I am thankful he and Warren did not come to a collision about them. I am always expecting that, having made those Marksedge people thieves, murder will be the next consequence.'

A few seconds sufficed to bring the ludicrous back. 'How pat it comes! Mary, did you prime Mrs. Warren, or did Frampton?'

'I believe you had rather laugh at yourself than at any one else,' exclaimed his aunt, who felt baffled at having thrown away her compassion.

'Of course. One knows how much can be borne. Why, Mary, has that set you studying—do you dissent?'

'I was thinking whether it is the best thing to be always ready to laugh at oneself,' said Mary. 'Does it always help in mending?'

“Don’t care” came to a bad end,’ said Louis; ‘but on the other hand, care killed a cat—so there are two sides to the question.’

While Mary was feeling disappointed at his light tone, he changed it to one that was almost mournful. ‘The worst of it is, that “don’t care” is my refuge. Whatever I *do* care about is always thwarted by Frampton or somebody, and being for ever thrown over, I have only to fall as softly as I can.’

‘You know, my dear,’ said Mrs. Frost, ‘that your father has no command of means to gratify you.’

‘There are means enough for ourselves,’ said Louis; ‘that is the needful duty. What merely personal indulgence did I ever ask for that was refused me?’

‘If that is all you have to complain of, I can’t pity you,’ said Mary.

‘Listen, Mary. Let me wish for a horse, there it is! Let me wish for a painted window, we can’t afford it, though, after all, it would not eat; but horses are an adjunct of state and propriety. So again, the parish feasted last 18th of January, because I came of age, and it was *proper*; while if I ask that our people may be released from work on Good Friday or Ascension Day, it is thought outrageous.’

‘If I remember right, my dear,’ interposed his aunt, ‘you wanted no work to be done on any saint’s-day. Was there not a scheme that Mr. Holdsworth called the cricket cure?’

‘That may yet be. No one knows the good a few free days would do the poor. But I developed my plan too rapidly! I’ll try again for their church-going on Good Friday.’

‘I think you ought to succeed there.’

‘I know how it will be. My father will ring, propound the matter to Frampton; the answer will be, “Quite impracticable, my lord;” and there will be an end of it.’

‘Perhaps not. At least it will have been considered,’ said Mary.

‘True,’ said Louis; ‘but you little know what it is to have a Frampton! If he be a fair sample of prime ministers, no wonder Princes of Wales go into the opposition!’

‘I thought Frampton was a very valuable superior servant.’

‘Exactly so. That is the worst of it. He is supreme authority, and well deserves it. When la Grande Mademoiselle stood before the gates of Orleans, calling to the sentinel to open them, he never stirred a step, but replied merely with profound bows. That is my case. I make a request, am answered, “Yes, my lord;” find no results, repeat the process, and at the fourth time am silenced with, “Quite impracticable, my lord.”’

‘Surely Frampton is respectable?’

‘It is his very essence. He is a thorough aristocrat, respecting himself, and therefore respecting all others, as they deserve. He respects a Viscount Fitzjocelyn as an appendage *nearly* as needful as the wyverns on each side of the shield; but as to the individual holding that office, he regards him much as he would one of the wyverns with a fool’s-cap on.’

And with those words, Fitzjocelyn had sprung into the hedge to gather the earliest willow-catkins, and came down dilating on their silvery, downy buds and golden blossoms, and on the pleasure they would give Miss Faithfull ; till Mary, who had been beginning to compassionate him, was almost vexed to think her pity wasted on grievances of mere random talk.

Warm and kindly was his greeting of his aunt's good old servant, Jane Beckett, whom Mary was well pleased to meet as one of the kind friends of her childhood. The refinement that was like an atmosphere around Mrs. Frost, seemed to have extended even to her servants ; for Jane, though she could hardly read, and carried her accounts in her head, had manners of a gentle warmth and propriety that had a grace of their own, even in her racy, bad grammar ; and there was no withstanding the merry smile that twitched up one side of her mouth, while her eyes twinkled in the varied moods prompted by an inexhaustible fund of good temper, sympathy, and affection ; but the fulness of her love was for the distant 'Master Oliver,' whose young nursery-maid she had been. Her eyes winked between tears and smiles when she heard that Miss Mary had seen him but five months ago, and she inquired after him, gloried in his prosperity, and talked of his coming home, with far less reserve than his mother had done.

Mary was struck, also, with the pretty, modest looks of the little underling, and remarked on them as they proceeded to the inspection of the next house.

'Yes,' said Louis, 'Charlotte is something between a wood-sorrel and a five-plume moth. Tom Madison, as usual, shows exquisite taste. She is a perfect Lady of Eschalott.'

'Now, Louis !' said his aunt, standing still, and really looking annoyed ; 'you know I cannot encourage any such thing. Poor little Charlotte is an orphan, and I am all the more responsible for her.'

'There's a chivalry in poor Tom—'

'Nonsense !' said his aunt, as if resolved not to hear him out, because afraid of herself. 'Don't say any more about it. I wish I had never allowed of his bringing your messages.'

'Who set him down in the kitchen to drink a cup of beer ?' said Louis, mischievously.

'Ah ! well ! one comfort is, that girls never care for boys of the same age,' replied Aunt Catharine, as she turned the key, and admitted them into No. 7 ; when Fitzjocelyn confused Mary's judgment with his recommendations, till Aunt Catharine, pointing out the broken shutter, and asking if he would not have been better employed in fetching the carpenter, than in hectoring the magistrates, he promised to make up for it, fetched a piece of wood and James's tools, and was quickly at work, his aunt only warning him, that if he lost Jem's tools she would not say it was her fault.

By the time Mary's imagination had portrayed what paper,

paint, furniture, and habitation might make the house, and had discerned how to arrange a pretty little study in case of her father's return, he had completed the repair in a workmanlike manner, and putting two fingers to his cap, asked, 'Any other little job for me, ma'am?'

Of course, he forgot the tools, till shamed by Mary's turning back for them, and after a merry luncheon, served up in haste by Jane, they betook themselves to No. 8, where the Miss Faithfulls were seated at a dessert of hard biscuits and water, of neither of which they ever partook: they only adhered to the hereditary institution of sitting for twenty minutes after dinner with their red and purple doileys before them.

Mary seemed to herself carried back fourteen years, and to understand why her childish fancy had always believed Christiana's Mercy a living character, when she found herself in the calm, happy little household. The chief change was that she must now bend down, instead of reaching up, to receive the kind embraces. Even the garments seemed unchanged, the dark merino gowns, black silk aprons, white cap-ribbons, the soft little Indian shawl worn by the elder sister, the ribbon bow by the younger, distinctions that used to puzzle her infant speculation, not aware that the coloured bow was Miss Mercy's ensign of youth, and that its absence would have made Miss Salome feel aged indeed. The two sisters were much alike—but the younger was the more spare, shrivelled up into a cheery nonpareil, her bloom changed into something quite as fresh and healthful, and her blithe tripping step always active, except when her fingers were nimbly taking their turn. Miss Salome had become more plump, her cheek was smoother and paler, her eye more placid, her air that of a patient invalid, and her countenance more intellectual than her sister's. She said less about their extreme enjoyment of the yam, and while Mrs. Frost and Mary held counsel with Miss Mercy on servants and furniture, there was a talk on entomology going on between her and Fitzjocelyn.

It was very pretty to see him with the old ladies, so gently attentive, without patronizing, and they, though evidently doting on him, laughing at him, and treating him like a spoilt child. He insisted on Mary's seeing their ordinary sitting-room, which nature had intended for a housekeeper's room, but which ladylike inhabitants had rendered what he called the very 'kernel of the House Beautiful.' There were the stands of flowers in the window; the bullfinch scolding in his cage, the rare old shells and china on the old-fashioned cabinets that Mary so well remembered; and the silk patchwork sofa-cover, the old piano, and Miss Faithfull's arm-chair by the fire, her little table with her beautiful knitting, and often a flower or insect that she was copying, for she still drew nicely: and she smiled and consented, as Louis pulled out her portfolios, life-long collections of portraits of birds, flowers, or insects. Her knitting found a sale at the workshop, where the object was well

known, and the proceeds were diffused by her sister, and whether *she* deserved her name might be guessed by the basket of poor people's stores beside her chair.

Miss Mercy was well known in every dusky Northwold lane or alley, where she always found or made a welcome for herself. The kindly counsel and ready hand were more potent than far larger means without them.

Such neighbours were in themselves a host, and Mary and her mother both felt as if they had attained a region of unwonted tranquillity and repose, when they had agreed to rent No. 7, Dynevor Terrace, from the ensuing Lady-day, and to take possession when carpenters and upholsterers should have worked their will.

Louis was half-way home when he exclaimed, 'There! I have missed Tom Madison a second time. When shall I ever remember him at the right time?'

Little did Louis guess the effect his neglect was taking! Charlotte Arnold might have told, for Mrs. Martha had brought in stories of his unsteadiness and idle habits that confirmed her in her obedience to Jane. She never went out alone in his leisure hours; never looked for him in returning from church—alas! that was not the place to look for him now. And yet she could not believe him such a very bad boy as she was told he had become.

CHAPTER V

THE TWO MINISTERS

'The creature's neither one nor t'other.
I caught the animal last night,
And viewed him o'er by candle-light;
I marked him well, 'twas black as jet.
You stare, but, sirs, I've got him yet,
And can produce him.' 'Pray, sir, do;
I'll lay my life the thing is blue.'
'And I'll be sworn, that when you've seen
The reptile, you'll pronounce him green.'
'Well, then, at once to end the doubt,'
Replies the man, 'I'll turn him out;
And when before your eyes I've set him,
If you don't find him black, I'll eat him.'
He said—then, full before their sight
Produced the beast, and lo! 'twas white!—MERRICK

MRS. PONSONBY had seen in the tropics birds of brilliant hues, that even, whilst the gazer pronounced them all one beaming tint of gorgeous purple, would give one flutter, and in another light would flash with golden green or fiery scarlet. No less startling and unexpected were the aspects of Lord Fitzjocelyn, 'Everything by starts, and nothing long;' sometimes absorbed in study, sometimes equally ardent over a childish game; wild about philanthropic plans, and apparently forgetting them the instant a cold word had fallen on them; attempting everything,

finishing nothing ; dipping into every kind of book, and forsaking it after a cursory glance ; ever busy, yet ever idle ; full of desultory knowledge, ranging through all kinds of reading and natural history, and still more full of talk. This last was perhaps his most decided gift. To any one, of whatever degree, he would talk ; he could hardly have been silent ten minutes with any human being, except Frampton or his father ; and whether deep reflections or arrant nonsense came out of his mouth, seemed an even chance, though both alike were in the same soft low voice, and with the same air of quaint pensive simplicity. He was exceedingly provoking, and yet there was no being provoked with him !

He was so sincere, affectionate, and obliging, that not to love him was impossible ; yet that love only made his faults more annoying, and Mrs. Ponsonby could well understand his father's perpetual restless anxiety, for his foibles were exactly of the sort most likely to tease such a man as the Earl ; and the most positively unsatisfactory part of his character was the *insouciance* that he displayed when his trifling or his wild projects had given umbrage. Yet, even here, she could not but feel a hope, such as it was, that the carelessness might be the effect of want of sympathy and visible affection from his father, whose very anxiety made him the more unbending ; and that, what a worse temper might have resented, rendered a good one gaily reckless and unheeding.

She often wondered whether she should try to give a hint—but Lord Ormersfield seemed to dread leading to the subject, although on all else that interested him he came to her as in old times, and seemed greatly refreshed and softened by her companionship.

An old friend and former fellow-minister had proposed spending a night at Ormersfield. He was the person whom the Earl most highly esteemed, and, in his own dignified way, he was solicitous that the household should be in more than usually perfect order, holding a long conference with the man of whom he *was* sure, Frampton. Would that he could have been equally sure of his son ! He looked at him almost wistfully several times during breakfast, and at last, as they rose, gave an exhortation 'that he would be punctual to dinner at half-past seven, which would give him ample time, and he hoped he would be—' He paused for a word, and his son supplied it. 'On my good behaviour, I understand.' With that he walked off, leaving Lord Ormersfield telling Mrs. Ponsonby that it was the first introduction, as he had 'for various reasons' thought it undesirable to bring Fitzjocelyn early to London, and betraying his own anxiety as to the impression he might produce on Sir Miles Oakstead. His own perplexity and despondency showed themselves in his desire to view his son with the eyes of others, and he also thought the tenor of Fitzjocelyn's future life might be coloured by his friend's opinion.

Evening brought the guest. Mrs. Ponsonby was not well enough to appear at dinner ; but Mary and Mrs. Frost, pleased to see an historical character, were in the drawing-room, enjoying Sir Miles's agreeable conversation, until they caught certain misgivings reflected in each other's looks, as time wore on and nothing had been seen or heard of Louis. The half-hour struck ; the Earl waited five minutes, then rang the bell. 'Is Lord Fitzjocelyn come in ?'

'No, my lord.'

'Bring in the dinner.'

Mary longed to fly in search of him, and spare further vexation. She had assumed all an elder sister's feelings, and suffered for him as she used to do, when he was in disgrace and would not heed it. She heard no more of the conversation, and was insensible to the honour of going in to dinner with the late Secretary of State, as she saw the empty place at the table.

The soup was over, when she was aware of a step in the hall, and beside her stood a gray figure, bespattered with mud, shading his eyes with his hand, as if dazzled by the lights. 'I beg your pardon,' were the words, 'but I was obliged to go to Northwold. I have shot a rose-coloured pastor !'

'Shot him !' cried Mary. 'Was he much hurt ?'

'Killed ! I took him to Miss Faithfull, to be sketched before he is stuffed—'

A clearer view of the company, a wave of the hand from the Earl, and the young gentleman was gone. Next he opened the library door, saying, 'Here's my pretty behaviour !'

'Louis ! what is the matter ?' cried Mrs. Ponsonby.

'I entirely forgot the right honourable, and marched into the dining-room to tell Aunt Catharine that I have killed a rose-coloured pastor.'

'Killed what ?'

'A bird, hardly ever seen in England. I spied him in the fir-wood, went to Warren for a gun, brought him down, and walked on to the House Beautiful, where Miss Faithfull was enchanted. She will copy him, and send him to the bird-stuffer. I looked in to give directions, and old Jenyns was amazed ; he never knew one shot here before, so early in the year too. He says we must send the account to the Ornithological—'

'Do you know how wet you are ?' exclaimed Mrs. Ponsonby, seeing rivulets dropping from his coat.

'I see. It rained all the way home, and was so dark, I could not see the footpath ; and when I came in, my eyes were blinded by the light, and my head so full of the pastor, that the other minister never occurred to me, and remains under the impression that I have confessed a sacrilegious murder.'

'You really are incorrigible !' cried Mrs. Ponsonby. 'Why are you not dressing for dinner ?'

'Because you are going to give me a cup of your tea.'

'Certainly not. I shall begin to think you purposely

mortified your father, when you know he wanted you to be reasonable.'

'The lower species never show off well to strangers,' said Fitzjocelyn, coolly ; but, as he lighted his candle, he added, with more candour, 'I beg your pardon—indeed I did not do this on purpose ; but don't say anything about appearances—there's something in me that is sure to revolt.'

So noiselessly that the moment was unknown, the vacant chair was filled by a gentleman irreproachably attired, his face glowing with exercise, or with what made him very *debonnaire* and really silent, dining rapidly and unobtrusively, and never raising his eyes even to his aunt, probably intending thus to remain all the evening ; but presently Sir Miles turned to him and said, 'Pray satisfy my curiosity. Who is the rose-coloured pastor?'

Louis raised his eyes, and meeting a pleasing, sensible face, out beamed his arch look of suppressed fun as he answered, 'He is not at all clerical. He is otherwise called the rose-coloured ouzel or starling.'

'Whence is that other startling name?'

'From his attending flocks of sheep, on the same mission as jackdaws fulfil here—which likewise have an ecclesiastical reputation—

"A great frequenter of the church."'

Fearing alike nonsense and ornithology, Lord Ormersfield changed the subject, and Louis subsided ; but when the gentlemen came into the drawing-room, Mrs. Ponsonby was surprised to see him taking a fair share, and no more, of the conversation. Some information had been wanted about the terms of labour in the mining districts, and Louis's visit to Illershall enabled him to throw light on the subject, with much clearness and accuracy. Sir Miles had more literature than Lord Ormersfield, and was more used to young men ; and he began to draw Fitzjocelyn out, with complete success. Louis fully responded to the touch, and without a notion that he was showing himself to the best advantage, he yielded to the pleasure, and for once proved of what he was capable—revealing unawares an unusual amount of intelligence and observation, and great power of expression. Not even his aunt had ever seen him appear so much like a superior man, and the only alloy was his father's ill-repressed dread lest he should fall on dangerous ground, and commit himself either to his wildly philanthropical or extravagantly monarchical views, whichever might happen to be in the ascendant. However, such shoals were not approached, nor did Louis ever plunge out of his depth. The whole of his manner and demeanour were proofs that, in his case, much talk sprang from exuberance of ideas, not from self-conceit.

He was equally good in the morning ; he had risen early to hunt up some information which Sir Miles wanted, and the

clearness and readiness with which he had found it were wonderful. The guest was delighted with him; gave him a warm invitation to Oakstead, and on being left alone with Mrs. Ponsonby, whom he had formerly known, expressed his admiration of his friend's son—as a fine, promising young man, of great ability and originality, and, what was still more remarkable, of most simple, natural manners, perfectly free from conceit. He seemed the more amazed, when he found, what he would hardly believe, that Fitzjocelyn was twenty-one, and had nearly finished his university education.

The liking was mutual. No sooner had Sir Miles departed, than Louis came to the library in a rapture, declaring that here was the refreshing sight of a man unspoilt by political life, which usually ate out the hearts of people.

Mary smiled at this, and told him that he was talking 'like an old statesman weary of the world.'

'One may be weary of the world beforehand as well as after,' said he.

'That does not seem worth while,' said Mary.

'No,' he said, 'but one's own immediate look-out may not be flattering, whatever the next turn may bring;' and he took up the newspaper, and began to turn it over. "As butler—as single-handed man—as clerk and accountant." There, those are the lucky men, with downright work, and some one to work for. Or, just listen to this!' and he plunged into a story of some heroic conduct during a shipwreck. While he was reading it aloud, with kindling eyes and enthusiastic interest, his father opened the door. 'Louis,' he said, 'if you are doing nothing, I should be obliged if you would make two copies of this letter.'

Louis glanced at the end of what he was reading, laid the paper down, and opened a blotting-book.

'You had better come into the study, or you will not write correctly.'

'I can write, whatever goes on.'

'I particularly wish this to be legible and accurate. You have begun too low down.'

Louis took another sheet.

'That pen is not fit to write with.'

'The pens are delusions,' said Louis, trying them round, in an easy, idle way; 'I never could mend a quill. How is this steel one? Refuses to recognize the purpose of his existence. Aunt Catharine, do you still forbid steel pens in your school? If so, it must be the solitary instance. How geese must cackle blessings on the inventor! He should have a testimonial—a silver inkstand representing the goose that laid the golden eggs,—and all writing-masters should subscribe. Ha! where did this pen come from? Mary, were you the bounteous mender? A thousand thanks.'

If Louis fretted his father by loitering and nonsense, his

father was no less trying by standing over him with advice and criticisms which would have driven most youths beyond patience, but which he bore with constant good-humour, till his father returned to the study, when he exclaimed, 'Now, Mary, if you like to finish the wreck, it will not interrupt me. This is mere machine-work.'

'Thank you,' said Mary; 'I should like it better afterwards. Do you think I might do one copy for you? Or would it not suit Lord Ormersfield!'

Louis made polite demurs, but she overruled them and began.

He stretched himself, took up his *Times*, and skimmed the remaining incidents of the shipwreck, till he was shamed by seeing Mary half-way down the first page, when he resumed his pen, overtook her, and then relapsed into talk, till Mrs. Frost fairly left the room, to silence him.

As the two copies were completed, Lord Ormersfield returned; and Mary, with many apologies, presented her copy, and received most gracious thanks and compliments on her firm, clear writing; a vexation to her rather than otherwise, since 'Fitzjocelyn' was called to account for dubious scrawls, errors, and erasures.

He meekly took another sheet, consoling himself, however, by saying, 'I warn you that pains will only make it Miss Fanny.'

'What do you mean?'

As if glad to be instigated, he replied, 'Did you never hear of my signature being mistaken by an ingenious person, who addressed his answer to "Miss Fanny Jocelyn"? Why, Fanny has been one of Jem's regular names for me ever since! I have the envelope somewhere as a curiosity. I'll show it to you, Mary.'

'You seem to be proud of it!' exclaimed his father, nearly out of patience. 'Pray tell me whether you intend to copy this creditably or not.'

'I will endeavour, but the Fates must decide. I *can* scrawl, or, with pains, I *can* imitate Miss Fanny; but the other alternative only comes in happy moments.'

'Do you mean that you cannot write well if you choose?'

'It is like other arts—an inspiration. Dogberry was deep when he said it came by nature.'

'Then make no more attempts. No. That school-girl's niggles is worse than the first.'

'Fanny, as I told you,' said Louis, looking vacantly up in resigned despair, yet not without the lurking expression of amusement; 'I will try again.'

'No, I thank you, I will have no more time wasted.'

Louis passively moved to the window, where he exclaimed that he saw Aunt Catharine sunning herself in the garden, and must go and help her.

'Did you ever see anything like that?' cried Lord Ormersfield, thoroughly moved to displeasure.

'There was at least good-humour,' said Mrs. Ponsonby. 'Pardon me, there was almost as much to try his temper as yours.'

'He is insensible!'

'I think not. A word from Aunt Catharine rules him.'

'Though you counselled it, Mary, I doubt whether her training has answered. Henry Frost should have been a warning.'

Mary found herself blundering in her new copy, and retreated with it to the study, while her mother made answer: 'I do not repent of my advice. The affection between him and Aunt Catharine is the greatest blessing to him.'

'Poor boy!' said his father, forgetting his letters as he stood pondering. Mrs. Ponsonby seized the moment for reporting Sir Miles's opinion, but the Earl did not betray his gratification. 'First sight!' he said. 'Last night and this afternoon he is as unlike as these are;' and he placed before her Louis's unlucky copies, together with a letter written in a bold, manly hand. 'Three different men might have written these! And he pretends he cannot write like this, if he please!'

'I have no doubt it is to a certain extent true. Yes, absolutely true. You do not conceive the influence that *mood* has on some characters before they have learnt to master themselves. I do not mean temper, but the mere frame of spirits. Even sense of restraint will often take away the actual power from a child, or where there is not a strong will.'

'You are right!' said he, becoming rigid as if with pain. 'He is a child! You have not yet told me what you think of him. You need not hesitate. No one sees the likeness more plainly than I do.'

'It is strong externally,' she said; 'but I think it is more external than real, more temperament than character.'

'You are too metaphysical for me, Mary;' and he would fain have smiled.

'I want you to be hopeful. Half the object would be attained if you were, and he really deserves that you should.'

'He will not let me. If I hope at one moment, I am disappointed the next.'

'And how? By nothing worse than boyishness. You confirm what my aunt tells me, that there has never been a serious complaint of him.'

'Never. His conduct has always been blameless; but every tutor has said the same—that he has no application, and allows himself to be surpassed by any one of moderate energy!'

'Blameless conduct! How many fathers would give worlds to be able to give such a character of a son!'

'There are faults that are the very indications of a manly spirit,' began the Earl, impatiently. 'Not that I mean that I wish—he has never given me any trouble—but just look at James Frost, and you would see what I mean! There's energy in him

—fire—independence ; you feel there is substance in him, and like him the better for having a will and way of his own.’

‘So, I think, has Louis ; but it is so often thwarted, that it sinks away under the sense of duty and submission.’

‘If there were any consistency or reason in his fancies, they would not give way so easily ; but it is all talk, all extravagant notions—here one day, gone the next. Not a spark of ambition !’

‘Ambition is not so safe a spark that we should wish to see it lighted.’

‘A man must wish to see his son hold his proper station, and aim high ! No one can be satisfied to see him a trifler.’

‘I have been trying to find out why he trifles. As far as I can see, he has no ambition, and I do not think his turn will be for a life like yours. His bent is towards what is to do good to others. He would make an admirable country gentleman.’

‘A mere farmer, idling away his time in his fields.’

‘No ; doing infinite good by example and influence, and coming forward whenever duty required it. Depend upon it, the benefit to others is the impulse which can work on Louis, not personal ambition. Birth has already given him more than he values.’

‘You may be right,’ said Lord Ormersfield ; ‘but it is hard to see so many advantages thrown away, and what sometimes seems like so much ability wasted. But who can tell ? he is never the same for an hour together.’

‘May it not be for want of a sphere of wholesome action ?’

‘He is not fit for it, Mary. You know I resolved that the whole burthen of our losses should fall on me ; I made it my object that he should not suffer, and should freely have whatever I had at the same age. Everything is cleared at last. I could give him the same income as I started in life with ; but he is so reckless of money, that I cannot feel justified in putting it into his hands. Say what I will, not a vacation occurs but he comes to tell me of some paltry debt of ten or fifteen pounds.’

‘He comes to tell you ! Nay, never say he has no resolution ! Such debts as those, what are they compared with other young men’s, of which they do not tell their fathers ?’

‘If he were like other youths, I should know how to deal with him. But you agree with me, he is not fit to have a larger sum in his hands.’

‘Perhaps not ; he is too impulsive and inexperienced. If you were to ask me how to make it conduce to his happiness, I should say, lay out more on the estate, so as to employ more men, and make improvements in which he would take interest.’

‘I cannot make him care for the estate. Last winter, when he came of age, I tried to explain the state of affairs ; but he was utterly indifferent—would not trouble himself to understand the papers he was to sign, and made me quite ashamed of such an exhibition before Richardson.’

‘I wish I could defend him ! And yet—you will think me

unreasonable, but I do believe that if he had thought the welfare of others was concerned, he would have attended more.'

'Umph!'

'I am not sure that it is not his good qualities that make him so hard to deal with. The want of selfishness and vanity seem to take away two common springs of action, but I do believe that patience will bring out something much higher when you have found the way to reach it.'

'That I certainly have not, if it be there.'

'To cultivate his sympathies with you,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, hesitating, and not venturing to look into his face.

'Enough, Mary,' he said, hastily. 'You said the like to me once before.'

'But,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, firmly, '*here* there is a foundation to work on. There are affections that only need to be drawn out to make you happy, and him—not, perhaps, what you now wish, but better than you wish.'

His face had become hard as he answered, 'Thank you, Mary; you have always meant the best. You have always been kind to me, and to all belonging to me.'

Her heart ached for the father and son, understanding each other so little, and paining each other so much; and she feared that the Earl's mind had been too much cramped, and his feelings too much chilled, for such softening on his part as could alone, as it seemed, prevent Louis from being estranged, and left to his naturally fickle and indolent disposition.

Mary had in the meantime completed her copies, and left them on the Earl's table; and wishing neither to be thanked nor contrasted with Louis, she put on her bonnet, to go in search of Aunt Catharine. Not finding her in the garden, she decided on visiting old Gervas and his wife, who had gladly caught at her offer of reading to them. The visit over, she returned by the favourite path above Ferny dell, gathering primroses, and meditating how to stir up Louis to finish off his rocky steps, and make one piece of work complete. She paused at the summit of them, and was much inclined to descend and examine what was wanting, when she started at hearing a rustling beneath, then a low moan and an attempt at a call. The bushes and a projecting rock cut off her view; but, in some trepidation, she called out, 'Is any one there?' Little did she expect the answer—

'It is I—Fitzjocelyn. Come! I have had a fall.'

'I'm coming—are you hurt?' she cried, as with shaking limbs she prepared to begin the descent.

'Not that way,' he called; 'it gave way—go to the left.'

She was almost disobeying; but, recalling herself to thought, she hurried along the top till the bank became practicable, and tore her way through brake and brier, till she could return along the side of the stream.

Horror-struck, she perceived that a heavy stone had given

way and rolled down, bearing Louis with it, to the bottom, where he lay, ghastly and helpless. She called to him ; and he tried to raise himself, but sank back. 'Mary ! is it you ? I thought I should have died here,' he said ; as she knelt by him, exclaiming, 'Oh, Louis ! Louis ! what a dreadful fall !'

'It is my fault,' he eagerly interrupted. 'I am glad it has happened to no one else.'

'And you are terribly hurt ! I must go for help : but what can I do for you ? Would you like some water ?'

'Water ! Oh ! I have heard it all this time gurgling there !'

She filled his cap, and bathed his face, apparently to his great relief ; and she ventured to ask if he had been long there.

'Very long !' he said. 'I must have fainted after I got the stone off my foot, so I missed Gervas going by. I thought no one else would come near. Thank God !'

Mary almost grew sick as she saw how dreadfully his left ankle had been crushed by a heavy stone ; and her very turning towards it made him shudder, and say, 'Don't touch me ! I am shattered all over.'

'I am afraid I should only hurt you,' she said, with difficulty controlling herself. 'I had better fetch some one.'

He did not know how to be left again ; but the damp chilliness of his hands made her the more anxious to procure assistance, and, after spreading her shawl over him, she made the utmost speed out of the thicket. As she emerged, she saw Lord Ormersfield riding with his groom, and her scream and sign arrested him ; but, by the time they met, she could utter nothing but 'Louis !'

'Another accident !' was the almost impatient answer.

'He is dreadfully hurt !' she said, sobbing and breathless. 'His foot is crushed ! He has been there this hour !'

The alarm was indeed given. The Earl seemed about to rush away without knowing whither ; and she had absolutely to withhold him, while, summoning her faculties, she gave directions to Poynings. Then she let him draw her on, too fast for speaking, until they reached the spot where Louis lay, so spent with pain and cold, that he barely opened his eyes at their voices, made no distinct answers as to his hurts, and shrank and moaned when his father would have raised him.

Mary contrived to place his head on her lap, bathed his forehead and chafed his hands, while Lord Ormersfield stood watching him with looks of misery, or paced about, anxiously looking for the servants.

They came at last, all too soon for poor Louis, who suffered terribly in the transport, and gave few tokens of consciousness, except a cry now and then extorted by a rougher movement.

None of the household, scarcely even Mrs. Frost, seemed at first to be able to believe that Lord Fitzjocelyn could really have hurt himself seriously. 'Again !' was the first word of every one, for his many slight accidents were treated like

crying 'Wolf'; but Frampton himself looked perfectly pale and shocked when he perceived how the matter really stood; and neither he nor Lord Ormersfield was half so helpful as Mrs. Frost. The shock only called out her energy in behalf of her darling, and, tender as her nature was, she shrank from nothing that could soothe and alleviate his suffering; and it did infinitely comfort him, as he held her hand and looked with affection into her face, even in the extremity of pain.

Fain would others have been the same support; but his father, though not leaving him, was completely unnerved, and unable to do anything; and Mrs. Ponsonby was suffering under one of the attacks that were brought on by any sudden agitation. Mary, though giddy and throbbing in every pulse, was forced to put a resolute check on herself—brace her limbs, steady her voice, and keep her face composed, while every faculty was absorbed in listening for sounds from her cousin's room, and her heart was quivering with an anguish of prayer and suspense. Could she but hide her burning cheeks for one moment, let out one of the sobs that seemed to be rending her breast, throw herself on her knees and burst into tears, what an infinite relief it would be! But Mary had learnt to spend her life in having no self.

CHAPTER VI

FAREWELLS

What yet is there that I should do,
Lingering in this darksome vale?
Proud and mighty, fair to view,
Are our schemes, and yet they fail,
Like the sand before the wind,
That no power of man can bind.—ARNDT, *Lyra Germanica*

DYNEVOR TERRACE was said to have dark, damp kitchens, but by none who had ever been in No. 5, when the little compact fire was compressed to one glowing red crater of cinders, their smile laughing ruddily back from the bright array on the dresser, the drugget laid down, the round oaken table brought forward, and Jane Beckett, in afternoon trim, tending her geraniums, the offspring of the parting Cheveleigh nosegay, or gauffering her mistress's caps. No wonder that on raw evenings, Master James, Miss Clara, or my young lord, had often been found gossiping with Jane, toasting their own cheeks as well as the bread, or pinching their fingers in her gauffering machine.

Yet, poor little Charlotte Arnold learnt that the kitchen could be dreary, when Mrs. Beckett had been summoned to nurse Lord Fitzjocelyn, and she remained in sole charge, under Mrs. Martha's occasional supervision. She found herself, her household cares over all too soon, on a cold light March afternoon, with the clock ticking loud enough for midnight, the smoke-jack indulging in supernatural groans, and the whole lonely

house full of undefined terrors, with an unlimited space of the like solitude before her. She would even have been glad to be sure of an evening of Mrs. Martha's good advice, and of darning stockings! She sat down by the round table to Mr. James's wristbands; but every creak or crack of the furniture made her start, and think of death-watches. She might have learnt to condemn superstition, but that did not prevent it from affecting her nerves.

She spread her favourite study, *The Old English Baron*, on the table before her; but the hero had some connection in her mind with Tom Madison, for whom she had always coveted a battle-field in France. What would he feel when he heard how he had filled up his course of evil, being well-nigh the death of his benefactor! If any one ought to be haunted, it would assuredly be no other than Tom!

Chills running over her at the thought, she turned to the fire as the thing nearest life, but at the moment started at a hollow call of her own name. A face was looking in at her through the geraniums! She shrieked aloud, and clasped her hands over her eyes.

'Don't make a row. Open the door!'

It was such a relief to hear something unghostly, that she sprang to the door; but as she undid it, all her scruples seized her, and she tried to hold it, saying, 'Don't come in! You unfortunate boy, do you know what you have done?'

But Tom Madison was in a mood before which her female nature cowered. He pushed the door open, saying authoritatively, 'Tell me how he is!'

'He is as ill as he can be to be alive,' said Charlotte, actuated at once by the importance of being the repository of such tidings, and by the excitement of communicating them to one so deeply concerned. 'Mr. Poynings came in to fetch Mrs. Beckett—he would have no one else to nurse him—and he says the old lord and missus have never had their clothes off these two nights.'

'Then, was it along of them stones?' asked the lad, hoarsely.

'Yourself should know best!' returned Charlotte. 'Mr. Poynings says 'twas a piece of rock as big as that warming-pan as crushed his ankle! and you know—'

'I know nothing,' said Tom. 'Master kept me in all day yesterday, and I only heard just now at Little Northwold, where I've been to take home some knives of Squire Calcott's. Master may blow me up if he likes, but I couldn't come till I'd heard the rights of it. Is he so very bad?'

'They've sent up to London for a doctor,' pursued Charlotte. 'Mr. Walby don't give but little hope of him. Poor young gentleman, I'm sure he had a good word from high and low!'

'Well! I'm gone!' cried Tom, vehemently. 'Good-bye to you, Charlotte Arnold! You'll never see me in these parts more!'

'Gone! Oh, Tom! what do you mean?'

'D'ye think I'll stay here to have this here cast in my face?'

Such a one as won't never walk the earth again !' and he burst into passionate tears. 'I wish I was dead !'

'Oh, hush, Tom !—that is wicked !'

'May be so ! I am all that's wicked, and you all turn against me !'

'I don't turn against you,' sobbed Charlotte, moved to the bottom of her gentle heart.

'You ! you turned against me long ago. You've been too proud to cast one look at me these three months ; and he *forgot* me ; and that's what drew me on, when who cared what became of me—nor I neither now.'

'Don't speak that way ! Don't say 'twas pride. Oh no ! but I had to behave proper, and how should I keep up acquaintance when they said you went on—unsteady—'

'Aye, aye ! I know how it is,' said poor Tom, with broken-down humility : 'I was not fit for you then, and I'm next thing to a murderer now ; and you're like a white dove that the very fingers of me would grime. I'll take myself out of your way ; but, let what will come of me, I'll never forget you, Charlotte.'

'Oh, wait, Tom ! If I could but say it right !—Oh ! I know there's something about biding patiently, and getting a blessing—if you'd only stop while I recollect it.'

'I thought I heard voices !' exclaimed Mrs. Martha, suddenly descending on them. 'I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourselves, and the family in such trouble ! Downright owdacious !'

'Be this your house ?' said Tom, stepping before Charlotte, his dejection giving way instantly to rude independence.

'Oh, very well,' said Martha, with dignity. 'I know what to expect from such sort of people. The house and young woman is in my charge, sir ; and if you don't be off, I'll call the police.'

'Never trouble your old bones !' retorted Tom. 'Good-bye to you, Charlotte ;' and, as in defiance of Martha, he took her passive hand, 'You'll remember one as loved you true and faithful, but was drove desperate ! Good-bye ! I'll not trouble no one no more !'

The three concluding negatives with which he dashed out of the house utterly overwhelmed Charlotte, and made her perfectly insensible to Mrs. Martha's objurgations. She believed in the most horrible and desperate intentions, and sobbed herself into such violent hysterics that Miss Mercy came in to assist—imagined that the rude boy had terrified her, misunderstood her shamefaced attempts at explanation, and left her lying on her bed, crying quietly over her secret terrors, and over that first, strangely-made declaration of love. The white dove ! she did not deserve it, but it was so poetical ! and poor Tom was so unhappy ! She had not time even to think what was become of her own character for wisdom and prudence.

The next morning, between monition and triumph, Martha announced that the good-for-nothing chap was off with a valuable parcel of Mr. Calcott's, and the police were after him ;

with much more about his former idle habits,—frequenting of democratic oratory, public-houses, and fondness for bad company and strolling actors. Meek and easily cowed, Charlotte only opened her lips to say she knew that he had taken home Mr. Calcott's parcel. But this brought down a storm on her for being impertinent enough to defend him, and she sat trembling till it had subsided; and Martha retreating, left her to weep unrestrainedly over her wild fancies, and the world's cruelty and injustice towards one whom, as she was now ready to declare, she loved with her whole heart.

The bell rang sharply, knocks rattled at the front door! She was sure that Tom had been just taken out of the river! But instinct to answer the bell awoke at the second furious clattering and double pealing, which allowed no time for her to compose her tear-streaked, swollen face, especially as the hasty sounds suggested 'Mr. James.'

Mr. James it was, but the expected rebuke for keeping him waiting was not spoken. As he saw her sorrowful looks, he only said, low and softly, 'Is it so, Charlotte?' In his eyes, there could be but one cause for grief, and Charlotte's heart smote her for hypocrisy, when she could barely command her voice to reply, 'No, sir; my lord has had a little better night.' He spoke with unusual gentleness, as he made more inquiries than she could answer; and when, after a few minutes, he turned to walk on to Ormersfield, he said, kindly, 'Good-bye, Charlotte; I'll send you word if I find him better;' and the tears rose in his eyes at the thought how every one loved the patient.

He was not wrong. There was everywhere great affection and sympathy for the bright, fantastic being whom all laughed at and liked, and Northwold and the neighbourhood felt that they could have better spared something more valuable.

The danger was hardly exaggerated even by Charlotte. The chill of the long exposure had brought on high fever; and besides the crushed ankle, there had been severe contusions, which had resulted in an acute pain in the side, hitherto untouched by remedies, and beyond the comprehension of the old Northwold surgeon, Mr. Walby. As yet, however, the idea of peril had not presented itself to Louis, though he was perfectly sensible. Severe pain and illness were new to him; and though not fretful nor impatient, he had not the stoicism either of pride or of physical indifference, put little restraint on the expression of suffering, and was to an almost childish degree absorbed in the present. He was always considerate and grateful; and his fond affection for his Aunt Catharine, and for good old Jane, never failed to show itself whenever they did anything for his relief; and they were the best of nurses.

Poor Lord Ormersfield longed to be equally effective; but he was neither handy nor ready, and could only sit hour after hour beside his son, never moving except to help the nurses, or to try to catch the slightest accent of the sufferer. Look up when

Louis would, he always saw the same bowed head, and earnest eyes, which, as Mrs. Ponsonby told her daughter, looked as they did when Louisa was dying.

The coming of the London surgeon was an era to which Louis evidently looked anxiously ; with the iteration of sickness, often reckoning the hours till he could arrive ; and when at last he came, there was an evident effort to command attention.

When the visit was over, and the surgeon was taking leave after the consultation, Fitzjocelyn calmly desired to know his opinion, and kept his eyes steadily fixed on his face, weighing the import of each word. All depended on the subduing the inflammatory action in the side ; and there was every reason to hope that he would have strength for the severe treatment necessary. There was no reason to despond.

‘I understand—thank you,’ said Louis.

He shut his eyes, and lay so still that Mrs. Frost trusted that he slept ; but when his father came in, they were open, and Lord Ormersfield, bending over him, hoped he was in less pain.

‘Thank you, there is not much difference.’ But the plaintive sound was gone ; the suffering was not the sole thought.

‘Walby is coming with the leeches at two o’clock,’ said Lord Ormersfield ; ‘I reckon much on them.’

‘Thank you.’ Silence again ; but his face spoke a wish, and his Aunt Catharine said, ‘What, my dear?’

‘I should like to see Mr. Holdsworth,’ said Louis, with eyes appealing to his father.

‘He has been here to inquire every day,’ said the Earl, choosing neither to refuse nor understand. ‘Whenever it is not too much for you—’

‘It must be quickly, before I am weaker,’ said Louis. ‘Let it be before Walby returns, father.’

‘Whatever you wish, my dear—’ and Lord Ormersfield, turning towards the table, wrote a note, which Mrs. Frost offered to despatch, thinking that her presence oppressed her elder nephew, who looked bowed down by the intensity of grief, which, unexpressed, seemed to pervade the whole man, and weigh him to the earth : and perhaps this also struck Louis for the first time, for, after having lain silent for some minutes, he softly said, ‘Father!’

The Earl was instantly beside him ; but, instead of speaking, Louis gazed in his face, and sighed, as he murmured, ‘I was meant to have been a comfort to you.’

‘My dear boy—’ began Lord Ormersfield, but he could not trust his voice, as he saw Louis’s eyes moist with tears.

‘I wish I had!’ he continued ; ‘but I have never been anything but a care and vexation, and I see it all too late.’

‘Nay, Louis,’ said his father, trying to assume his usual tone of authority, as if to prove his security, ‘you must not give way to feelings of illness. It is weak to despond.’

‘It is best to face it,’ said the young man, with slow and

feeble utterance, but with no quailing of eye or voice. 'But oh, father! I did not think you would feel it so much. I am not worth it.'

For the Earl could neither speak nor breathe, as if smothered by one mighty unuttered sob, and holding his son's hand between both his own, pressed it convulsively.

'I am glad Mrs. Ponsonby is here,' said Louis; 'and you will soon find what a nice fellow Edward Fitzjocelyn is, whom you may make just what—'

'Louis, my own boy, hush! I cannot bear this,' cried his father, in an accent wrung from him by excess of grief.

'I *may* recover,' said Louis, finding it his turn to comfort; 'and I should like to be longer with you, to try to make up—'

'You will. The leeches must relieve you. Only keep up your spirits: you have many years before you of happiness and success.'

The words brought a look of oppression over Louis's face, but it cleared as he said, 'I am more willing to be spared those years!'

His father positively started. 'Louis, my poor boy,' he said, 'is it really so? I know I have seemed a cold, severe father.'

'Oh, do not say so!' exclaimed Louis; 'I have deserved far less—idle, ungrateful, careless of your wishes. I did not know I could pain you so much, or I would not have done it. You have forgiven often; say you forgive now.'

'You have far more to forgive than I,' said the Earl.

'If I could tell you the half—waywardness, discontent, neglect, levity, wasted time—my treatment of you only three days back. Everything purposed—nothing done! Oh! what a life to bring before the Judge!' And he covered his face, but his father heard long-drawn sobs.

'Compose yourself, my dear boy,' he exclaimed, exceedingly grieved and perplexed. 'You know there is no cause to despond; and even—even if there were, you have no reason to distress yourself. I can say, from the bottom of my heart, that you have never given me cause for real anxiety; your conduct has been exemplary, and I never saw such attention to religion in any young man. These are mere trifles—'

'Oh, hush, father!' exclaimed Louis. 'You are only making it worse; you little know what I am! If Mr. Holdsworth would come!'

'He could only tell you the same,' said his father. 'You may take every comfort in thinking how blameless you have been, keeping so clear of all the faults of your age. I may not have esteemed you as you deserved, my poor Louis; but, be assured that very few can have so little to reproach themselves with as you have.'

Louis almost smiled. 'Poor comfort that,' he said, 'even if it were true; but oh, father!' and there was a light in his eye, 'I had thought of "He hath blotted out like a cloud thy transgressions."'

'That is right. One like you must find comfort in thinking.'

'There is comfort ineffable,' said Louis; 'but if I knew what I may dare to take home to myself! It is all so dim and confused. This pain will not let anything come connectedly. Would you give me that little manuscript book?'

It was given; and as the many loose leaves fell under Louis's weak hand, his father was amazed at the mass of copies of prayers, texts, and meditations that he had brought together; the earlier pages containing childish prayers written in Aunt Catharine's hand. Louis's cheeks coloured at the revelation of his hidden life, as his father put them together for him.

'It is of no use,' he said, sadly; 'I cannot read. Perhaps my aunt would come and read this to me.'

'Let me,' said his father; and Louis looked pleased. Lord Ormersfield read what was pointed out. To him it was a glimpse of a very new world of contrition, faith, hope, and prayer; but he saw the uneasy expression on Louis's face give place to serenity, as one already at home in that sphere.

'Thank you,' he said. 'That was what I wanted. Mr. Holdsworth will soon come, and then I don't want to say much more. Only don't take this too much to heart—I am not worth it; and but for you and the dear Terrace home, I can be very glad. If I *may* hope, the hope is so bright! Here there are so many ways of going wrong, and all I do always fails; and yet I always tried to do Him service. Oh, to have all perfect!—no failure—no inconsistency—no self! Can it be?'

'I always tried to do Him service!' Sadly and dejectedly as the words were spoken, mournful as was the contrast between the will and the result, this was the true cause that there was peace with Louis. Unstable, negligent, impetuous, and weak as he had been, the one earnest purpose had been his, guarding the heart, though not yet controlling the judgment. His soul was awake to the unseen, and thus the sense of the reality of bliss ineffable, and power to take comfort in the one great Sacrifice, came with no novelty nor strangeness. It was a more solemn, more painful preparation, but such as he had habitually made, only now it was for a more perfect Festival.

His father, as much awestruck by his hopes as distressed by his penitence, still gave himself credit for having soothed him, and went to meet and forewarn the Vicar that poor Fitzjocelyn was inclined to despond, and was attaching such importance to the merest foibles in a most innocent life, that he required the most tender and careful encouragement. He spoke in his usual tone of authoritative courtesy; and then, finding that his son wished to be left alone with Mr. Holdsworth, he went to the library to seek the only person to whom he could bear to talk.

'Mary,' he said, 'you were right. I have done so little to make that poor boy of mine happy, that he does not wish for life.'

Mrs. Ponsonby looked up surprised. 'Are you sure of what

he meant?' she said. 'Was it not that this life has nothing to compare with that which is to come?'

'But what can be more unnatural?' said the Earl. 'At his age, with everything before him, nothing but what he felt as my harshness could so have checked hope and enjoyment. My poor Louis!' And, though eye and voice were steady and tearless, no words could express the anguish of his undertone.

Mrs. Ponsonby adduced instances showing that, to early youth, with a heart still untainted by the world, the joys of the Life Everlasting have often so beamed out as to efface all that earth could promise; but he could not be argued out of self-reproach for his own want of sympathy, and spoke mournfully of his cold manner, sternness to small faults, and denial of gratifications.

Mary the younger could not help rising from her corner to say, 'Indeed, Louis said the other day that you never had denied him any personal indulgence.'

'My dear, he never asked for personal indulgences,' said the Earl. His further speech was interrupted by a quick step, a slow opening of the door, and the entrance of James Frost, who grasped his outstretched hand with a breathless inquiry.

'He is very ill—' Lord Ormersfield paused, too much oppressed to say more.

'No better? What did the London surgeon say? what?'

'He says there is no time to be lost in attacking the inflammation. If we can subdue that, he may recover; but the state of the ankle weakens him severely. I believe myself that he is going fast,' said the Earl, with the same despairing calmness; and James, after gazing at him to collect his meaning, dropped into a chair, covered his face with his hands, and sobbed aloud.

Lord Ormersfield looked on as if he almost envied the relief of the outburst; but James's first movement was to turn on him, as if he were neglecting his son, sharply demanding, 'Who is with him?'

'He wished to be left with Mr. Holdsworth.'

'Is it come to this!' cried James. 'Oh, why did I not come down with him? I might have prevented all this!'

'You could not have acted otherwise,' said the Earl, kindly. 'Your engagement was already formed.'

'I could!' said James. 'I would not. I thought it one of your excuses for helping us.'

'It is vain to lament these things now,' said Lord Ormersfield. 'It is very kind in you to have come down, and it will give him great pleasure if he be able to see you.'

'If!' James stammered between consternation and anger at the doubt, and treated the Earl with a kind of implied resentment as if for injustice suffered by Louis; but it was affecting to see his petulance received with patience, almost with gratitude, as a proof of his affection for Louis. The Earl stood upright and motionless before the fire, answering steadily, but

in an almost inward voice, all the detailed questions put by James, who, seated on one chair, with his hands locked on the back of the other, looked keenly up to him with his sharp black eyes, often overflowing with tears, and his voice broken by grief. When he had elicited that Louis had been much excited and distressed by the thought of his failings, he burst out, 'Whatever you may think, Lord Ormersfield, no one ever had less on his conscience!'

'I am sure of it.'

'I know of no one who would have given up his own way again and again without a murmur, only to be called fickle.'

'Yes, it has often been so,' meekly said Lord Ormersfield.

'Fickle!' repeated James, warming with the topic, and pouring out what had been boiling within for years. 'He was only fickle because his standard was too high to be reached! You thought him weak!'

'There may be weakness by nature strengthened by principle,' said Mrs. Ponsonby.

'True,' cried Jem, who, having taken no previous notice of her, had at first on her speaking bent his brows on her as if to extend to her the storm he was inflicting on poor, defenceless Lord Ormersfield, 'he is thought soft because of his easy way; but come to the point where harm displays itself, you can't move him a step farther—though he hangs back in such a quiet, careless fashion, that it seems as if he was only tired of the whole concern, and so it goes down again as changeableness.'

'You always did him justice,' said Lord Ormersfield, laying his hand on his cousin's shoulder; but James retreated ungraciously.

'I suppose, where he saw evil, he actually took a dislike,' said Mrs. Ponsonby.

'It is an absolute repugnance to anything bad. You,' turning again on the Earl, 'had an idea of his being too ready to run into all sorts of company; but I told you there was no danger.'

'You told me I might trust to his disgust to anything unrefined or dissipated. You knew him best.'

'There is that about him which men, not otherwise particular, respect as they might a woman or child. They never show themselves in their true colours, and I have known him uphold them because he has never seen their worst side!'

'I have always thought he learnt that peculiar refinement from your grandmother.'

'I think,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, softly, 'that it is purity of heart which makes him see heaven so bright.'

'Sydney Calcott walked part of the way with me,' continued Jem, 'and showed more feeling than I thought was in him. He said just what I do, that he never saw any one to whom evil seemed so unable to cling. He spoke of him at school—said he was the friend of all the juniors, but too dreamy and uncertain for fellows of his own standing. He said, at first they did not know what to make of him, with his soft looks and cool ways—they could not make him understand bullying, for he could

not be frightened nor put in a passion. Only once, one great lout tried forcing bad language on him ; and then Fitzjocelyn struck him, fought him, and was thoroughly licked to be sure : but Calcott said it was a moral victory—no one tried the like again—'

James was interrupted by Mr. Holdsworth's entrance. He said a few words apart to the Earl, who answered, with alarm, 'Not now ; he has gone through enough.'

'I told him so ; but he is very anxious, and begged me to return in the evening.'

'Thank you. You had better join us at dinner.'

The Vicar understood Lord Ormersfield better than did James, and said, pressing his hand, 'My lord, it is heart-breaking ; but the blessedness is more than we can feel.'

Mrs. Ponsonby and Mary were left to try to pacify James, who was half mad at his exclusion from the sick-room, and very angry with every hint of resignation—abusing the treatment of the doctors, calling Mr. Walby an old woman, and vehemently bent on prophesying the well-doing of the patient. Keenly sensitive, grief and suspense made him unusually irritable ; and he seemed to have no power of waiting patiently, and trusting the event to wiser Hands.

Mrs. Ponsonby dared not entertain any such ardent wishes. Life had not afforded her so much joy that she should deem it the greatest good, and all that she had heard gave her the impression that Louis was too soft and gentle for the world's hard encounter,—most pure and innocent, sincere and loving at present, but rather with the qualities of childhood than of manhood, with little strength or perseverance, so that the very dread of taint or wear made it almost a relief to think of his freshness and sweetness being secured for ever. Even when she thought of his father, and shrank from such grief for him, she could not but see a hope that this affliction might soften the heart closed up by the first and far worse sorrow, and detach it from the interests that had absorbed it too exclusively. All this was her food for silent meditation. Mary sat reading or working beside her, paler perhaps than her wont, and betraying that her ear caught every sound on the stairs, but venturing no word except the most matter-of-fact remark, quietly giving force to the more favourable symptoms.

Not till after Mr. Walby's second visit, when there was a little respite in the hard life-and-death contest between the remedies and the inflammation, could Mrs. Frost spare a few moments for her grandson. She met him on the stairs—threw her arms round his neck, called him her poor Jemmy, and hastily told him that he must not make her cry. He looked anxiously in her face, and told her that he must take her place, for she was worn out.

'No, thank you, my dear ; I can rest by and by.'

It sounded very hopeless.

'Come, granny, you always take the bright side.'

'Who knows which is the bright side?' she said. 'Such as he are always the first. But there, dear Jem, I told you not to make too much of granny—' and hastily withdrawing her hand, she gave a parting caress to his hair as he stood on the step below her, and returned to her charge.

It would have been an inexpressible comfort to James to have had some one to reproach. His own wretchedness was like a personal injury, and an offence that he could resent would have been a positive relief. He was forced to get out of the way of Frampton coming up with a tray of lemonade, and glared at him, as if even a station on the stairs were denied, then dashed out of doors, and paced the garden, goaded by every association the scene recalled. It seemed mere barbarity to deprive him of what he now esteemed as the charm of his life—the cousin who had been as a brother, ever seeking his sympathy, never offended by his sharp, imperious temper, and though often slighted or tyrannized over, meeting all in his own *debonnaire* fashion, and never forsaking the poor, hard-working student, so that he might well feel that the world could not offer him aught like Louis Fitzjocelyn.

He stood in the midst of the botanical garden, and, with almost triumphant satisfaction, prognosticated that *now* there would be regret that Louis's schemes had been neglected or sneered at, and when too late, his father might feel as much sorrow as he had time for. It was the bitterness, not the softness of grief, in which he looked forth into the dull blue east-windy haze deepening in the twilight, and presently beheld something dark moving along under the orchard bank beneath. 'Hollo! who's there?' he exclaimed, and the form, rearing itself, disclosed young Madison, never a favourite with him, and though, as a persecuted *protégé* of Louis, having claims which at another time might have softened him, coming forward at an unlucky moment, when his irritation only wanted an object on which to discharge itself. It was plain that one who came skulking in the private grounds could intend no good, and James greeted him, harshly, with 'You've no business here!'

'I'm doing no harm,' said the boy, doggedly, for his temper was as stubborn as James's was excitable.

'No harm! lurking here in that fashion in the dark! You'll not make me believe that! Let me hear what brings you here! The truth, mind!'

'I came to hear how Lord Fitzjocelyn is,' said Tom, with brief bluntness and defiance.

'A likely story! What, you came to ask the apple-trees?' and James scornfully laughed. 'There was no back-door, I suppose! I could forgive you anything but such a barefaced falsehood, when you know it was your own intolerable carelessness that was the only cause of the accident!'

'Better say 'twas yourself!' cried Tom, hoarse with passion, and shaking all over.

The provocation was intense enough to bring back James's real principle and self-restraint, and he spoke with more dignity. 'You seem to be beside yourself, Madison,' he said; 'you had better go at once, before any one finds you here. Lord Fitzjocelyn cared for you so much, that I should not wish for you to meet your deserts under present circumstances. Go! I wish to have no more of your tongue!'

The boy was bounding off, while James walked slowly after to see him beyond the grounds, and finding Warren the keeper, desired him to be on the look-out. Warren replied with the tidings that Madison had run away from his place, and that the police were looking out for him on the suspicion of having stolen Mr. Calcott's parcel, moralizing further on the depravity of such doings when my young lord was so ill, but accounting for the whole by pronouncing poaching to be bred in the bone of the Marksedge people.

This little scene had done Jem a great deal of good, both by the exhalation of bitterness and by the final exertion of forbearance. He had, indeed, been under two great fallacies on this day,—soothing Charlotte for the grief that was not caused by Fitzjocelyn's illness, and driving to extremity the lad brimming over with sorrow not inferior to his own. Little did he know what a gentle word might have done for that poor, wild, tempestuous spirit!

Yet, James's heart smote him that evening, when, according to Louis's earnest wish, Mr. Holdsworth came again, and they all were admitted to the room, and he saw the feeble sign and summons to the Vicar to bend down and listen. 'Tell poor Madison it was wrong in me not to go to see him. Give him one of my books, and tell him to go on well!'

That day had been one of rapid change, and the remedies and suffering had so exhausted Louis that he could scarcely speak, and seemed hardly conscious who was present. All his faculties were absorbed in the one wish, which late in the evening was granted. The scene was like an epitome of his life—the large irregular room, cumbered with the disorderly apparatus of all his multifarious pursuits, while there he lay on his little narrow iron bed, his features so fair and colourless as to be strangely like his mother's marble effigy—his eyes closed, and his brows often contracted with pain, so that there was a doubt how far his attention was free; but still with a calm, pure sweetness, that settled down more and more, as if he were being lulled into a sleep.

'He is asleep,' Mrs. Frost said, as they all rose up.

They felt what that sleep might become.

'We might as well wish to detain a snow-wreath,' thought Mr. Holdsworth.

CHAPTER VII

GOSSAMER

Chaos is come again.—*Othello*

THAT sleep was not unto death. When James and Mary came simultaneously creeping to the door in the gray twilight of the morning, they heard that there had been less pain and more rest ; and gradually throughout the day, there was a diminution of the dangerous symptoms, till the trembling hope revived that the patient might be given back again to life.

James was still sadly aggrieved at being forbidden the sick-room, and exceedingly envied Lord Ormersfield's seat there. He declared, so that Mary doubted whether it were jest or earnest, that the Earl only remained there because society expected it from their relative positions, and that it must retard poor Fitz-jocelyn's recovery to be perpetually basilisked by those cold gray eyes. Mary stood up gallantly for the Earl, who had always been so kind to her, and, on her mother's authority, vouched for his strong though hidden feelings ; to which Jem replied, 'Aye ! he was hiding a strong fear of being too late for the beginning of the Session.'

'I do not think it right to impute motives,' said Mary.

'I would not, Mary, if I could help it,' said James ; 'but through the whole course of my life I have never seen a token that his lordship is worthy of his son. If he were an ordinary, practical, commonplace block, apt to support his dignity, he might value him ; but all the grace, peculiarity, and unconventionality is a mere burthen and vexation, utterly wasted.'

Mary knew that she was a commonplace block, and did not wonder at herself for not agreeing with James, but cherishing a strong conviction that the father and son would now leave off rubbing against each other ; since no unprejudiced person could doubt of the strong affection of the father, nor of the warm gratitude of the son. In spite of the asperity with which James spoke of the Earl, she was beginning to like him almost as much as she esteemed him. This had not been the case in their childhood, when he used to be praised by the elders for his obedience to his grandmother and his progress in the Northwold Grammar School ; but was terribly overbearing with his juniors, and whether he cuffed Louis or led him into mischief, equally distressed her. Grown up he was peculiarly *vis*, quick and ready, unselfish in all his ways, and warmly affectionate—a very agreeable companion where his sensitiveness was not wounded, and meriting high honour by his deeper qualities. Young as he was, he had already relieved his grandmother from his own maintenance : he had turned to the utmost account his education at the endowed school at Northwold ; by sheer diligence, had obtained, first a

scholarship and then a fellowship at Oxford ; and now, by practising rigid economy, and spending his vacations in tuition, he was enabled to send his sister to a boarding-school. He had stolen a few days from his pupils on hearing of Fitzjocelyn's danger, but was forced to return as soon as the improvement became confirmed. On the previous day, he asked Mary to walk with him to the scene of the accident ; and they discussed the cause with more coolness than they really felt, as they shuddered at the depth of the fall, and the size of the stones.

James declared it all the fault of that runaway scamp, young Madison, in whom Louis had always been deceived, and who had never been seen since the night of his apparition in the garden.

'Poor boy ! I suppose that was the reason he ran away,' said Mary.

'A very good thing too. He would never have been anything but a torment to Louis. I remember telling him he was setting the stones so as to break the neck of some one !'

'I think it would be of more use to build them up than to settle how they broke down,' said Mary. 'Do you think we could manage it safely ?'

'A capital thought !' cried James, eagerly, and no sooner said than done. The two cousins set to work—procured some cement from the bricklayer in the village, and toiled at their masonry with right good-will as long as light and time served them ; then made an appointment to meet at half-past six next morning, and finish their work.

When the rendezvous took place, they were rejoicing over Mrs. Frost's report of an excellent night, and over her own happy looks, from which James prognosticated that all her fatigue and watching had done no harm to her vigorous frame, for which gladness was always the best cordial. It was a joyous beginning on that spring morning, and seemed to add fresh sparkles to the dazzling dewdrops, and double merriment to the blackbirds and thrushes answering each other far and wide, around, as the sun drew up the gray veil of morning mist. 'They all seem holding a feast for his recovery !' exclaimed Mary, warming for once into poetry, as she trudged along, leaving green footmarks in the silver dew.

'Well they may,' said James ; 'for who loves them better than he ? I grudge myself this lovely morning, when he is lying there, and my poor Clara is caged up at that place—the two who would the most enjoy it.'

'Your going to see her will be as good as the spring morning.'

'Poor child ! I dread it !' sighed Jem.

It was his first voluntary mention of his sister. He had always turned the conversation when Mrs. Ponsonby or Mary had tried to inquire for her, and Mary was glad to lead him on to say more.

'I remember her last when you were teaching her to run

alone, and letting none of us touch her, because you said she was your child, and belonged to no one else.'

'I should not be so ungrateful, now that I am come to the sense of my responsibility in teaching her to go alone.'

'But she has Aunt Catharine,' said Mary, thinking that he was putting the natural guardian out of the question as much now as in the days referred to.

'My grandmother never had to do with any girl before, and does not profess to understand them. She let Clara be regularly a boy in school, at first learning the same lessons, and then teaching; and whatever I tried to impress in the feminine line, naturally, all went for nothing. She is as wild as a hare, and has not a particle of a girl about her!'

'But she is very young.'

'There it is again! She grows so outrageously. She is not sixteen, and there she is taller than granny already. It is getting quite absurd.'

'What advice do you want on that head?'

'Seriously, it is a disadvantage, especially to that sort of girl, who can't afford to look like a woman before her time. Well, as she must probably depend on herself, I looked out for as good a school as could be had for the means, and thought I had succeeded, and that she would be brought into some sort of shape. Granny was ready to break her heart, but thought it quite right.'

'Then, does it not answer?'

'That is just what I can't tell. You have been used to schools: I wish you could tell me whether it is a necessary evil, or Clara's own idiosyncrasy, or peculiar to the place.'

'Whether what is?'

'Her misery!'

'Misery! Why, there is nothing of that in her letters to my aunt. There is not a complaint.'

'She is a brave girl, who spares granny, when she knows it would be of no use to distress her. Judge now; there's the sort of letter that I get from her.'

Mary read.

'DEAREST JEMMY,—Write to me as quick as ever you can, and tell me how Louis is; and let me come home, or I shall run mad. It is no good telling me to command my feelings; I am sure I would if I could, for the girls are more detestable than ever; but what can one do when one cannot sleep nor eat? All the screaming and crying has got into one lump in my throat, because I can't get it out in peace. If I could only shy the inkstand at the English teacher's head! or get one moment alone and out of sight! Let me come home. I could at least run messages; and it is of no use for me to stay here, for I can't learn, and all the girls are looking at me. If they were but boys, they would have sense! or if I could but kick them! This will make you angry, but do forgive me; I can't help it,

for I am so very unhappy. Louis is as much to me as you are, and no one ever was so kind ; but I know he will get well—I know he will ; only if I knew the pain was better, and could but hear every minute. You need not come to fetch me ; only send me a telegraph, and one to Miss Brigham. I have money enough for a second-class ticket, and would come that instant. If you saw the eyes and heard the whispers of these girls, I am sure you would. I should laugh at such nonsense any other time, but now I only ask to be wretched quietly in a corner.

‘Your affectionate, nearly crazy, sister,

‘CLARA FROST DYNEVOR.’

Mary might well say that there was nothing more expedient than going to see Clara, and ‘much,’ said poor James, ‘he should gain by that,’ especially on the head that made him most uneasy, and on which he could only hint lightly—namely, whether the girls were ‘putting nonsense in her head.’

‘If they had done her any harm, she would never have written such a letter,’ said Mary.

‘True,’ said Jem. ‘She is a mere child, and never got that notion into her head for a moment ; but if they put it in, we are done for ! Or if the place were ever so bad, I can’t remove her now, when granny is thus occupied. One reason why I made a point of her going to school was, that I thought doing everything that Fitzjocelyn did was no preparation for being a governess.’

‘Oh ! I hope it will not come to that ! Mr. Oliver Dynevore talks of coming home in a very few years.’

‘So few, that we shall be gray before he comes. No ; Clara and I are not going to be bound to him for the wealth heaped up while my grandmother was left in poverty. We mean to be independent.’

Mary was glad to revert to Clara.

‘I must do the best I can for her for the present,’ said Jem, —‘try to harden her against the girls, and leave her to bear it. Poor dear ! it makes one’s heart ache ! And to have done it oneself, too ! Then, in the holidays, perhaps, you will help me to judge. You will be her friend, Mary ; there’s nothing she needs so much. I thought she would have found one at school, but they are not the right stamp of animal. She has been too much thrown on Louis ; and though he has made a noble thing of her, *that* must come to an end, and the sooner the better.’

Certainly, it was a perplexity for a young elder brother ; but there could not but remain some simple wonder in Mary’s mind whether the obvious person, Mrs. Frost, had not better have been left to decide for her granddaughter.

The building operations gave full occupation to the powers of the two cousins, and in good time before breakfast, all was successfully completed,—a hand-rail affixed, and the passage cleared out, till it looked so creditable, as well as solid, that there was

no more to wish for but that Louis should be able to see their handiwork.

James went away in the better spirits for having been allowed to shake Louis by the hand and exchange a few words with him. Mary augured that it would be the better for Clara and for the pupils.

All that further transpired from him was a cheerful letter to Mrs. Frost, speaking of Clara as perfectly well, and beginning to accommodate herself to her situation ; and from this Mary gathered that he was better satisfied.

The days brought gradual improvement to the patient, under Mrs. Frost's tender nursing, and his father's constant assiduity ; both of which, as he revived, seemed to afford him the greatest pleasure, and were requited with the utmost warmth and caressing sweetness towards his aunt, and towards his father with ever-fresh gratitude and delight. Lord Ormersfield was like another man, in the sick-room, whence he never willingly absented himself for an hour.

One day, however, when he was forced to go to Northwold on business, Louis put on a fit of coaxing importunity. Nothing would serve him but some of Jane Beckett's choice dried pears, in the corner of the oaken cupboard, the key of which was in Aunt Kitty's pocket, and no one must fetch them for him but Aunt Kitty herself. He was so absurdly earnest and grave about them, that Jane scolded him, and Mrs. Frost saw recovery in his arch eyes ; understanding all the time that it was all an excuse for complimenting Jane, and sending her to air herself, visit the Faithfull sisters, and inspect the Lady of Eschalott. So she consented to accompany Lord Ormersfield, and leave their charge to Mrs. Ponsonby, who found Louis quite elated at the success of his manœuvre—so much disposed to talk, and so solicitous for the good of his nurses, that she ventured on a bold stroke.

His chamber was nearly as much like a lumber-room as ever ; for any attempt to clear away or disturb his possessions had seemed, in his half-conscious condition, to excite and tease him so much, that it had been at once relinquished. Although the room was large, it was always too much crowded with his goods ; and the tables and chairs that had been brought in during his illness, had added to the accumulation which was the despair of Mrs. Beckett and Mr. Frampton. Mrs. Ponsonby thought it was time for Louis to make a sacrifice in his turn, and ventured to suggest that he was well enough to say where some of his things might be bestowed ; and though he winced, she persevered in representing how unpleasant it must be to his father to live in the midst of so much confusion. The *debonnaire* expression passed over his face, as he glanced around, saying, 'You are right. I never reflected on the stretch of kindness it must have been. It shall be done. If I lose everything, it will not be soon that I find it out.'

It evidently cost him a good deal, and Mrs. Ponsonby proposed that Mary should come and deal with his treasures; a plan at which he caught so eagerly, that it was decided that no time was like the present, and Mary was called. He could move nothing but his hands; but they were eagerly held out in welcome: and his eyes glittered with the bright smile that once she had feared never to see again. She felt a moisture in her own which made her glad to turn aside to her task even while he complimented her with an allusion to the labours of Hercules. It did not seem uncalled-for, when she began by raising a huge sheet of paper that had been thrown in desperation to veil the confusion upon the table, and which proved to be the Ordnance map of the county, embellished with numerous streaks of paint. 'The outlines of the old Saxon wappentakes,' said Louis: 'I was trying to make them out in blue, and the Roman roads in red. That mark is spontaneous; it has been against some paint.'

Which paint was found in dried swamps in saucers, while cakes of lake and Prussian blue adhered to the drawing-board.

'The colour-box is probably in the walnut-press; but I advise you not to irritate that yet. Let me see that drawing, the design for the cottages that Frampton nipped in the bud—'

'How pretty and comfortable they do look!' exclaimed Mary, pleased to come to something that was within her sphere of comprehension. 'If they were but finished?'

'Ah! I thought of them when I was lying there in the dell! Had they been allowed to stand where I wanted them, there would have been no lack of people going home from work; but, "Quite impracticable" came in my way, and I had no heart to finish the drawing.'

'What a pity!' exclaimed Mary.

'This was Richardson's *veto*, two degrees worse than Frampton's; and I shall never be able to abuse Frampton again. I have seen him in his true light now, and never was any one more kind and considerate. Ha, Mary, what's that?'

'It looks like a rainbow in convulsions.'

'Now, Mary, did not I tell you that I could not laugh? It is a diagram to illustrate the theory of light for Clara.'

'Does she understand *that*? ' cried Mary.

'Clara? She understands anything but going to school—poor child! Yes, burn that map of the strata!—not that—it is to be a painted window whenever I can afford one, but I never could make money stay with me. I never could think why—'

The *why* was evident enough in the heterogeneous mass—crumpled prints, blank drawing-paper, and maps heaped ruinously over and under books, stuffed birds, geological specimens, dislocated microscopes, pieces of Roman pavement, curiosities innumerable and indescribable; among which roamed blotting-books, memorandum-books, four pieces of India-rubber, three.

pair of compasses, seven paper-knives, ten knives, thirteen odd gloves, fifteen pencils, pens beyond reckoning, a purse, a key, half a poem on the Siege of Granada, three parts of an essay upon Spade Husbandry, the *dramatis personæ* of a tragedy on Queen Brunehault, scores of old letters, and the dust of three years and a half.

Louis owned that the arrangements conduced to finding rather than losing, and rejoiced at the disinterment of his long-lost treasures; but either he grew weary, or the many fragments, the ghosts of departed fancies, made him thoughtful; for he became silent, and only watched and smiled as Mary quietly and noiselessly completed her reforms, and arranged table and chairs for the comfort of his father and aunt. He thanked her warmly, and hoped that she would pursue her kind task another day,—a permission which she justly esteemed a great testimony to her having avoided annoying him. It was a great amusement to him to watch the surprised and pleased looks of his various nurses as each came in, and a real gratification to see his father settle himself with an air of comfort, observing that 'they were under great obligations to Mary.' Still, the sight of the arrangements had left a dreary, dissatisfied feeling with Louis: it might have been caught from Mary's involuntary look of disappointment at each incomplete commencement that she encountered,—the multitude of undertakings hastily begun, laid aside and neglected—nothing properly carried out. It seemed a mere waste of life, and dwelt on his spirits, with a weariness of himself and his own want of steadfastness—a sense of having disappointed her and disappointed himself; and he sighed so heavily several times, that his aunt anxiously asked whether he were in pain. He was, however, so much better, that no one was to sit up with him at night—only his father would sleep on a bed on the floor. As he bade him good night, Louis, for the first time, made the request that he might have his Bible given to him, as well as his little book; and on his father advising him not to attempt the effort of reading, he said, 'Thank you; I think I can read my two verses: I want to take up my old habits.'

'Have you really kept up this habit constantly?' asked his father, with wonder which Louis did not understand.

'Aunt Catharine taught it to us,' he said. 'I neglected it one half-year at school; but I grew so uncomfortable, that I began again.'

The Earl gave the little worn volume, saying, 'Yes, Louis, there has been a thread running through your life.'

'Has there been one thread?' sadly mused Louis, as he found the weight of the thick book too much for his weak hands, and his eyes and head too dizzy and confused for more than one verse:—

'I am come that they might have life,
And that they might have it more abundantly.'

The Bible sank in his hands, and he fell into a slumber so sound and refreshing, that when he opened his eyes in early morning, he did not at first realize that he was not awakening to health and activity, nor why he had an instinctive dread of moving. He turned his eyes towards the window, uncurtained, so that he could see the breaking dawn. The sky, deep blue above, faded and glowed towards the horizon into gold, redder and more radiant below ; and in the midst, fast becoming merged in the increasing light, shone the planet Venus in her pale, calm brilliance.

There was repose and delight in dwelling on that fair morning sky, and Louis lay dreamily gazing, while thoughts passed over his mind, more defined and connected than pain and weakness had as yet permitted. Since those hours in which he had roused his faculties to meet with approaching death, he had been seldom awake to aught but the sensations of the moment, and had only just become either strong enough, or sufficiently at leisure for anything like reflection. As he watched the eastern reddening, he could not but revert to the feelings with which he had believed himself at the gate of the City that needs neither sun nor moon to lighten it ; and, for the first time, he consciously realized that he was restored to this world of life.

The sensation was not unmixed. His youthful spirit bounded at the prospect of returning vigour, his warm heart clung round those whom he loved, and the perception of his numerous faults made him grateful for a longer probation ; but still he had a sense of having been at the borders of the glorious Land, and thence turned back to a tedious, doubtful pilgrimage.

There was much to occasion this state of mind. His life had been without great troubles, but with many mortifications ; he had never been long satisfied with himself or his pursuits, his ardour had only been the prelude to vexation and self-abasement, and in his station in the world there was little incentive to exertion. He had a strong sense of responsibility, with a temperament made up of tenderness, refinement, and inertness, such as shrank from the career set before him. He had seen just enough of political life to destroy any romance of patriotism, and to make him regard it as little more than party spirit, and dread the hardening and deadening process on the mind. He had a dismal experience of his own philanthropy ; and he had a conscience that would not sit down satisfied with selfish ease, pleasure, or intellectual pursuits. His smooth, bright, loving temper had made him happy ; but the past was all melancholy, neglect, and futile enterprise ; he had no attaching home—no future visions ; and, on the outskirts of manhood, he shrank back from the turmoil, the temptations, and the roughness that awaited him—nay, from the mere effort of perseverance, and could almost have sighed to think how nearly the death-pang had been over, and the home of Love, Life, and Light had been won for ever :—

'I am come that they might have life,
And that they might have it more abundantly:

The words returned on him, and with them what his father had said, 'You have had a thread running through your life.' He was in a state between sleeping and waking, when the confines of reflection and dreaming came very near together, and when vague impressions, hardly noticed at the time they were made, began to tell on him without his own conscious volition. It was to him as if from that brightening eastern heaven, multitudes of threads of light were floating hither and thither, as he had often watched the gossamer undulating in the sunshine. Some were firm, purely white, and glistening here and there with rainbow tints as they tended straight upwards, shining more and more into the perfect day; but for the most part they were tangled together in inextricable confusion, intermingled with many a broken end, like fleeces of cobweb driven together by the autumn wind,—some sailing aimlessly, or with shattered tangled strands—some white, some dark, some anchored to mere leaves or sprays, some tending down to the abyss, but all in such a perplexed maze that the eye could seldom trace which were directed up, which downwards, which were of pure texture, which defiled and stained.

In the abortive, unsatisfactory attempt to follow out one fluctuating clue, not without whiteness, and heaving often upwards, but frail, wavering, ravelled, and tangled, so that scarcely could he find one line that held together, Louis awoke to find his father wondering that he could sleep with the sun shining full on his face.

'It was hardly quite a dream,' said Louis, as he related it to Mrs. Frost.

'It would make a very pretty allegory.'

'It is too real for that just now,' he said. 'It was the moral of all my broken strands that Mary held up to me yesterday.'

'I hope you are going to do more than point your moral, my dear. You always were good at that.'

'I mean it,' said Louis, earnestly. 'I do not believe such an illness—ay, or such a dream—can come for nothing.'

So back went his thoughts to the flaws in his own course; and chiefly he bewailed his want of sympathy for his father. Material obedience and submission had been yielded; but, having little cause to believe himself beloved, his heart had never been called into action so as to soften the clashings of two essentially dissimilar characters. Instead of rebelling, or even of murmuring, he had hid disappointment in indifference, taken refuge in levity and versatility, and even consoled himself by sporting with what he regarded as prejudice or unjust displeasure. All this cost him much regret and self-reproach at each proof of the affection so long veiled by reserve. Never would he have given pain, had he guessed that his father could feel; but he had grown up to imagine the whole man made up of politics and

conventionalities, and his new discoveries gave him at least as much contrition as pleasure.

After long study of the debates, that morning, his father prepared to write. Louis asked for the paper, saying his senses would just serve for the advertisements, but presently he made an exclamation of surprise at beholding, in full progress, the measure which had brought Sir Miles Oakstead to Ormersfield, one of peculiar interest to the Earl. His blank look of wonder amused Mrs. Ponsonby, but seemed somewhat to hurt his father.

'You did not suppose I could attend to such matters now?' he said.

'But I am so much better!'

Fearing that the habit of reserve would check any exchange of feeling, Mrs. Ponsonby said, 'Did you fancy your father could not think of you except upon compulsion?'

'I beg your pardon, father,' said Louis, smiling, while a tear rose to his eyes; 'I little thought I was obstructing the business of the nation. What will Sir Miles do to me?'

'Sir Miles has written a most kind and gratifying letter,' said Lord Ormersfield, 'expressing great anxiety for you, and a high opinion of your powers.'

Louis had never heard of his own powers, except for mischief, and the colour returned to his cheeks, as he listened to the kind and cordial letter, written in the first shock of the tidings of the accident. He enjoyed the pleasure it gave his father far more than the commendation to himself; for he well knew, as he said, that 'there is something embellishing in a catastrophe,' and he supposed 'that had driven out the rose-coloured pastor.'

'There is always indulgence at your age,' said the Earl. 'You have created an impression which may be of great importance to you by and by.'

Louis recurred to politics. The measure was one which approved itself to his mind, and he showed all the interest which was usually stifled, by such subjects being forced on him. He was distressed at detaining his father when his presence might be essential to the success of his party, and the Earl could not bear to leave him while still confined to his bed. The little scene, so calm, and apparently so cold, seemed to cement the attachment of father and son, by convincing Louis of the full extent of his father's love; his enthusiasm began to invest the Earl's gray head with a perfect halo of wisdom slighted and affection injured; and the tenor of his thread of life shone out bright and silvery before him, spun out of projects of devoting heart and soul to his father's happiness, and meriting his fondness.

The grave Earl was looking through a magnifying-glass no less powerful. He had not been so happy since his marriage; the consciousness of his own cold manner made him grateful for any demonstration from his son, and the many little graces of look and manner which Louis had inherited from his mother

added to the charm. The sense of previous injustice enhanced all his good qualities, and it was easy to believe him perfect, while nothing was required of him but to lie still. Day and night did Lord Ormersfield wait upon him, grudging every moment spent away from him, and trying to forestall each wish, till he became almost afraid to express a desire, on account of the trouble it would cause. Mary found the Earl one day wandering among the vines in the old hothouse, in search of a flower, when, to her amusement, he selected a stiff pert double hyacinth, the special aversion of his son, who nevertheless received it most graciously, and would fain have concealed the headache caused by the scent, until Mrs. Frost privately abstracted it. Another day, he went, unasked, to hasten the bird-stuffer in finishing the rose-coloured pastor; and when it came, himself brought it up-stairs, unpacked it, and set it up where Louis could best admire its black nodding crest and pink wings; unaware that to his son it seemed a memento of his own misdeeds—a perpetual lesson against wayward carelessness.

‘It is like a new love,’ said Mrs. Ponsonby; ‘but oh! how much depends upon Louis after his recovery!’

‘You don’t mistrust his goodness *now*, mamma!’

‘I could not bear to do so. I believe I was thinking of his father more than of himself. After having been so much struck by his religious feeling, I dread nothing so much as his father finding him deficient in manliness or strength of character.’

CHAPTER VIII

A TRUANT DISPOSITION

Gathering up each broken thread—WHYTEHEAD

‘TOM MADISON is come back,’ said the Vicar, as he sat beside Fitzjocelyn’s couch, a day or two after Lord Ormersfield had gone to London.

‘Come back—where has he been?’ exclaimed Louis.

‘There!’ said the Vicar, with a gesture of dismay; ‘I forgot that you were to hear nothing of it! However, I should think you were well enough to support the communication.’

‘What is it?’ cried Louis, the blood rushing into his cheeks so suddenly, that Mr. Holdsworth felt guilty of having disregarded the precautions that he had fancied exaggerated by the fond aunt. ‘Poor fellow—he has not—’ but, checking himself, he added, ‘I am particularly anxious to hear of him.’

‘I wish there were anything more gratifying to tell you; but he took the opportunity of the height of your illness to run away from his place, and has just been passed home to his parish. After all your pains, it is very mortifying; but—’

‘Pains! Don’t you know how I neglected him latterly!’

said Louis. 'Poor fellow—then—' but he stopped himself again, and added, 'You heard nothing of the grounds?'

'They were not difficult to find,' said Mr. Holdsworth. 'It is the old story. He was, as Mrs. Smith told me, "a great trial,"—more and more disposed to be saucy and disobedient, taking up with the most good-for-nothing boys in the town, haunting those Chartist lectures, and never coming home in proper time at night. The very last evening, he had come in at eleven o'clock, and when his master rebuked him, came out with something about the rights of man. He was sent to Little Northwold, about the middle of the day, to carry home some silver-handled knives of Mr. Calcott's, and returned no more. Smith fancied, at first, that he had made off with the plate, and set the police after him; but that proved to be an over-hasty measure, for the parcel had been safely left. However, Miss Faithfull's servant found him frightening Mrs. Frost's poor little kitchen-maid into fits; and the next day James Frost detected him lurking suspiciously about the garden here, and set Warren to warn him off—'

Louis gave a kind of groan, and struck his hand against the couch in despair; then said, anxiously, 'What then?'

'No more was heard of him, till yesterday the police passed him home to the Union as a vagabond. He looks very ill and ragged; but he is in one of those sullen moods, when no one can get a word out of him. Smith declines prosecuting for running away, being only too glad of the riddance on any terms; so there he is at his grandfather's, ready for any sort of mischief.'

'Mr. Holdsworth,' said Louis, raising himself on his elbow, 'you are judging, like every one else, from appearances. If I were at liberty to tell the whole, you would see what a noble nature it was that I trifled with; and they have been hounding— Poor Tom! would it have been better for him that I had never seen him? It is a fearful thing, this blind treading about among souls, not knowing whether one does good or harm!'

'If you feel so,' said Mr. Holdsworth, hoping to lead him from the unfortunate subject, 'what must *we* do?'

'My position, if I live, seems to have as much power for evil, without the supernatural power for good. Doing hastily, or leaving undone, are equally fatal!'

'Nay, what hope can there be but in fear, and sense of responsibility?'

'I think not. I do more mischief than those who do not go out of their way to think of the matter at all!'

'Do you?' said the Vicar, smiling. 'At least, I know, for my own part, I prefer all the trouble and perplexity you give me, to a squire who would let me and my parish jog on our own way.'

'I dare say young Brewster never spoilt a Tom Madison.'

'The sight of self-indulgence spoils more than injudicious

care does. Besides, I look on these experiments as giving experience.'

'Nice experience of my best efforts!'

'Pardon me, Fitzjocelyn, have we seen your best?'

'I hope you will!' said Louis, vigorously. 'And to begin, will you tell this poor boy to come to me?'

Mr. Holdsworth had an unmitigated sense of his own indiscretion, and not such a high one of Fitzjocelyn's discretion as to make him think the interview sufficiently desirable for the culprit, to justify the possible mischief to the adviser, whose wisdom and folly were equally perplexing, and who would surely be either disappointed or deceived. Dissuasions and arguments, however, failed; and Mrs. Frost, who was appealed to as a last resource, no sooner found that her patient's heart was set on the meeting, than she consented, and persuaded Mr. Holdsworth that no harm would ensue equal to the evil of her boy lying there distressing himself.

Accordingly, in due time, Mr. Holdsworth admitted the lad, and, on a sign from Louis, shut himself out, leaving the runaway standing within the door, a monument of surly embarrassment. Raising himself, Louis said, affectionately, 'Never mind, Tom; don't you see how fast I am getting over it?'

The lad looked up, but apparently saw little such assurance in the thin pale cheeks, and feeble, recumbent form; for his face twitched all over, resumed the same sullen stolidity, and was bent down again.

'Come near, Tom,' continued Louis, with unabated kindness — 'come and sit down here. I am afraid you have suffered a great deal,' as the boy shambled with an awkward footsore gait. 'It was a great pity you ran away.'

'I couldn't stay!' burst out Tom, half crying.

'Why not?'

'Not to have that there cast in my teeth!' he exclaimed, with blunt incivility.

'Did any one reproach you?' said Louis, anxiously. 'I thought no one knew it but ourselves.'

'You knew it, then, my lord?' asked Tom, staring.

'I found out directly that there was no cement,' said Louis. 'I had suspected it before, and intended to examine whenever I had time.'

'Well! I thought when I came back, no one did seem to guess as 'twas all along of me!' cried Tom. 'So sure I thought you hadn't known it, my lord. And you never said nothing, my lord!'

'I trust not. I would not consciously have accused you of what was quite as much my fault as yours. That would not have been fair play.'

'If I won't give it to Bill Bettesworth!' cried Tom.

'What has he done?'

'Always telling me that gentlefolks hadn't got no notion of

fair play with the like of us, but held us like the dirt to be trampled on ! But there—I'll let him know—'

'Who is he?'

'A young man what works with Mr. Smith,' returned Tom, his sullenness having given place to a frank, open manner, such as any one but Louis would have deemed too free and ready.

'Was he your great friend at Northwold?'

'A chap must speak to some one,' was Tom's answer.

'And what kind of a some one was he?'

'Why, he comes down Illershall way. He knows a thing or two, and can go on like an orator or a playbook—or like yourself, my lord.'

'Thank you. I hope the thing or two were of the right sort.'

Tom looked sheepish.

'I heard something about bad companions. I hope he was not one. I ought to have come and visited you, Tom ; I have been very sorry I did not. You'd better let me hear all about it, for I fear there must have been worse scrapes than this of the stones.'

'Worse!' cried Tom—'sure nothing could be worserer!'

'I wish there were no evils worse than careless forgetfulness,' said Louis.

'I didn't forget!' said Tom. 'I meant to have told you whenever you came to see me, but'—his eyes filled and his voice began to alter—'you never came ; and she at the Terrace wouldn't look at me ! And Bill and the rest of them was always at me, asking when I expected my aristocrat, and jeering me 'cause I'd said you wasn't like the rest of 'em. So then I thought I'd have my liberty too, and show I didn't care no more than they, and spite you all.'

'How little one thinks of the grievous harm a little selfish heedlessness may do!' sighed Louis, half aloud. 'If you had only looked to something better than me, Tom ! And so you ran into mischief?'

Half confession, half vindication ensued, and the poor fellow's story was manifest enough. His faults had been unsteadiness and misplaced independence rather than any of the more degrading stamp of evils. The public-house had not been sought for liquor's sake, but for that of the orator who inflamed the crude imaginations and aspirations that effervesced in the youth's mind ; and the rudely-exercised authority of master and foreman had only driven his fierce temper further astray. With sense of right sufficient to be dissatisfied with himself, and taste and principle just enough developed to loathe the evils round him, hardened and soured by Louis's neglect, and rendered discontented by Chartist preachers, he had come to long for any sort of change or break ; and the tidings of the accident, coupled with the hard words which he knew himself to deserve but too well, had put the finishing stroke.

Hearing that the police were in pursuit of him, he had

fancied it was on account of the harm done by his negligence. 'I hid about for a day,' he said: 'somehow I felt as if I could not go far off, till I heard how you were, my lord; and I'd made up my mind that as soon as ever I heard the first stroke of the bell, I'd go and find the police, and his lordship might hang me, and glad!'

Louis was nearer a tear than a smile.

'Then, Mr. Frost finds me, and was mad at me. Nothing wasn't bad enough for me; and he sets Mr. Warren to see me off, so I had nothing for it but to cut.'

'What did you think of doing?' sighed Louis.

'I made for the sea. If I could have got to them places in the Indies, such as that Philip went to, as you reads about in the verse-book—he as killed his wife and lost his son, and made friends with that there big rascal, and had the chest of gold—'

'Philip Mortham! Were you going in search of buccaneers?'

'I don't know, my lord. Once you told me of some English sir, as kills the pirates, and is some sort of a king. I thought, maybe, now you'd tell me where they goes to dig for gold.'

'Oh, Tom, Tom, what a mess I have made of your notions!'

'Isn't there no such place?'

'It's a bad business, and what can you want of it?'

'I want to get shut of them as orders one about here and there, with never a civil word. Besides,' looking down, 'there's one I'd like to see live like a lady.'

'Would that make her happier?'

'I'll never see her put about, and slave and drudge, as poor mother did!' exclaimed Tom.

'That's a better spirit than the mere dislike to a master,' said Louis. 'What is life but obedience?'

'I'd obey fast enough, if folk would only speak like you do—not drive one about like a dog, when one knows one is every bit as good as they.'

'I'm sure I never knew that!'

Tom stared broadly.

'I never saw the person who was not my superior,' repeated Louis, quietly, and in full earnest. 'Not that this would make rough words pleasanter, I suppose. The only cure I could ever see for the ills of the world is, that each should heartily respect his neighbour.'

Paradoxes musingly uttered, and flying over his head, were to Tom a natural and comfortable atmosphere; and the conversation proceeded. Louis found that geography had been as much at fault as chronology, and that the runaway had found himself not at the sea, but at Illershall, where he had applied for work, and had taken a great fancy to Mr. Dobbs, but had been rejected for want of a character, since the good superintendent made it his rule to keep up a high standard among his men. Wandering had succeeded, in which, moneyless, forlorn, and unable to find employment, he had been obliged to part

with portions of his clothing to procure food ; his strength began to give way, and he had been found by the police sleeping under a hedge ; he was questioned, and sent home, crestfallen, sullen, and miserable, unwilling to stay at Marksedge, yet not knowing where to go.

His hankering was for Illershall ; and Louis, thinking of the judicious care, the evening school, and the openings for promotion decided at once that the experiment should be tried without loss of time. He desired Tom to bring him ink and paper, and hastily wrote :—

‘DEAR MR. DOBBS,—You would do me a great kindness by employing this poor fellow, and bearing with him. I have managed him very ill, but he would reward any care. Have an eye to him, and put him in communication with the chaplain. If you can take him, I will write more at length. If you have heard of my accident, you will excuse more at present.

‘Yours very truly,
‘FITZJOCELYN.’

Then arose the question, how Tom was to get to Illershall. He did not know ; and Louis directed his search into the places where the loose money in his pocket might have been put. When it was found, Tom scrupled at the proposed half-sovereign. Three-and-fourpence would pay for his ticket. ‘You will want a supper and a bed. Go respectably, Tom, and keep so. It will be some consolation for the mischief I have done you !’

‘You done me harm !’ cried Tom. ‘Why, ’tis all along of you that I ain’t a regularly-built scamp !’

‘Very irregularly built, whatever you are !’ said Louis. ‘But I’ll tell you what you shall do for me,’ continued he, with anxious earnestness. ‘Do you know the hollow ash-tree that shades over Inglewood stile ? It has a stout sucker, with a honeysuckle grown into it—coming up among the moss, where the great white vase-shaped funguses grew up in the autumn.’

‘I know him, my lord,’ said Tom, brightening at the detail, given with all a sick man’s vivid remembrance of the out-of-doors world.

‘I have fixed my mind on that stick ! I think it has a bend at the root. Will you cut it for me, and trim it up for a walking-stick ?’

‘That I will, my lord !’

‘Thank you. Bring it up to me between seven and eight in the morning, if you please ; and so I shall see you again—’

Mr. Holdsworth was entering to close the conversation, which had been already over-long and exciting ; for Louis, sinking back, mournfully exclaimed, ‘The medley of that poor boy’s mind is the worst of my pieces of work. I have made him too refined for one class, and left him too rough for another—discontented with his station, and too desultory and insub-

ordinate to rise ; nobleness of nature turning to arrogance, fact and fiction all mixed up together. It would be a study, if one was not so sorry !'

Nevertheless, Mr. Holdsworth could not understand how even Fitzjocelyn could have given the lad a recommendation, and he would have remonstrated, but that the long interview had already been sufficiently trying ; so he did his best to have faith in his eccentric friend's good intentions.

In the early morning, Tom Madison made his appearance, in his best clothes, erect and open-faced, a strong contrast to the jaded, downcast being who had yesterday presented himself. The stick was prepared to perfection, and Louis acknowledged it with gratitude proportioned to the fancies that he had spent on it, poising it, feeling the cool gray bark, and raising himself in bed to try how he should lean on it. 'Hang it up there, Tom, within my reach. It seems like a beginning of independence.'

'I wish, my lord,' blurted out Tom, in agitation, 'you'd tell me if you're to go lame for life, and then I should know the worst of it.'

'I suspect no one knows either the worst or the best,' said Louis, kindly. 'Since the pain has gone off, I have been content, and asked no questions. Mr. Walby says my ankle is going on so well, that it is a real picture, and a pleasure to touch it ; and though I can't say the pleasure is mutual, I ought to be satisfied.'

'You'll only laugh at me !' half sobbed Tom ; 'and if there was but anything I could do ! I've wished my own legs was cut off—and serve me right—ever since I seen you lying there.'

'Thank you ; I'm afraid they would have been no use to me ! But, seriously, if I had been moderately prudent, it would not have happened. And as it is, I hope I shall be glad of that roll in Ferny dell to the end of my life.'

'I did go to see after mending them stones !' cried Tom, as if injured by losing this one compensation ; 'but they are all done up, and there ain't nothing to do to them.'

'Look here, Tom : if you want to do anything for me, it is easily told what would be the greatest boon to me. They tell me I've spoilt you, and I partly believe it ; for I put more of my own fancies into you than of real good, and the way I treated you made you impatient of control : and then, because I could not keep you on as I should have wished,—as, unluckily, you and I were not made to live together on a desert island,—I left you without the little help I might have given. Now, Tom, if you go to the bad, I shall know it is all my fault—'

'That it ain't,' the boy tried to say, eagerly ; but Louis went on.

'Don't let my bad management be the ruin of you. Take a turn from this moment. You know Who can help you, and Who, if you had thought of Him, would have kept you straight when I forgot you. Put all the stuff out of your head about one man being equal to another. Equal they are ; but some have the

trial of ruling, others of obeying, and the last are the lucky ones. If we could only see their souls, we should know it. You'll find evening schools and lectures at Illershall; you'd better take to them, for you've more real liking for that sort of thing than for mischief; and if you finished up your education, you'd get into a line that would make you happier, and where you might do much good. There—promise me that you'll think of these things, and take heed to your Sundays.'

'I promise,' said Tom.

'And mind you write to me, Tom, and tell how you get on. I'll write, and let you know about your grandfather, and Marks-edge news and all—'

The 'Thank you, my lord,' came with great pleasure and alacrity.

'Some day, when you are a foreman, perhaps I may bring Miss Clara to see copper-smelting. Only mind, that you'll never go on soundly, nor even be fit to make your pretty tidy nest for any gentle bird, unless you mind one thing most of all; and that is, that we have had a new Life given us, and we have to begin now, and live it for ever and ever.'

As he raised himself, holding out his pale, slender hand from his white sleeve, his clear blue eyes earnestly fixed on the sky, his face all one onward look, something of that sense of the unseen passed into the confused, turbulent spirit of the boy, very susceptible of poetical impressions, and his young lord's countenance connected itself with all the floating notions left in his mind by parable or allegory. He did not speak as Louis heartily shook his hardy red hand, and bade him good speed; but his bow and pulled forelock at the door had in them more of real reverence than of conventional courtesy.

Of tastes and perceptions above his breeding, the very sense of his own deficiencies had made him still more rugged and clownish, and removed him from the sympathies of his own class; while he almost idolized the two most refined beings whom he knew, Lord Fitzjocelyn and Charlotte Arnold. On an interview with her, his heart was set. He had taken leave of his half-childish grandfather, made up his bundle, and marched into Northwold, with three hours still to spare ere the starting of the parliamentary train. Sympathy, hope, resolution, and the sense of respectability, had made another man of him; and, above all, he dwelt on the prospect held out of repairing the deficiencies of his learning. The consciousness of ignorance and awkwardness was very painful, and he longed to rub it off, and take the place for which he felt his powers. 'I will work!' thought he; 'I have a will to it, and, please God, when I come back next, it won't be as a rough, ignorant lout that I'll stand before Charlotte!'

'Louis,' said Mary Ponsonby, as she sat at work beside him that afternoon, after an expedition to the new house at Dynevor

Terrace, 'I want to know, if you please, how you have been acting like a gentleman.'

'I did not know that I had been acting at all of late.'

'I could not help hearing something in Aunt Catharine's garden that has made me very curious.'

'Ha !' cried Louis, eagerly.

'I was sowing some annuals in our back garden, and heard voices through the trellis. Presently I heard quite loud, "My young lord has behaved like a real gentleman, as he is, and no mistake, or I'd never have been here now." And presently, "I've promised him, and I promise you, Charlotte, to keep my Church, and have no more to do with them things. I'll keep it as sacred as they keeps the Temperance pledge ; for sure I'm bound to him, as he forgave me, and kept my secret as if I'd been his own brother : and when I've proved it, won't that satisfy you, Charlotte ?"'

'And what did Charlotte say ?'

'I think she was crying ; but I thought listening any more would be unfair, so I ran up-stairs and threw up the drawing-room window to warn them.'

'Oh, Mary, how unfeeling ?'

'I thought it could be doing no good !'

'That is so like prudent people, who can allow no true love under five hundred pounds a year ! Did you see them ? How did they look ?'

'Charlotte was standing in an attitude, her hands clasped over her broom. The gentleman was a country-looking boy—'

'Bearing himself like a sensible, pugnacious cock-robin ? Poor fellow, so you marred their parting.'

'Charlotte flew into the house, and the boy walked off up the garden. Was he your Madison, Louis ? for I thought my aunt did not think it right to encourage him about her house.'

'And so he is to be thwarted in what would best raise and refine him. That great, bright leading star of a well-placed affection is not to be allowed to help him through all the storms and quicksands in his way.'

Good Mary might well open her eyes ; but, pondering a little, she said, 'He need not leave off liking Charlotte, if that is to do him good ; but I suppose the question is, what is safest for her ?'

'Well, he is safe enough. He is gone to Illershall to earn her.'

'Oh ! then I don't care ! But you have not answered me, and I think I can guess the boy's secret that you have been keeping. Did you not once tell me that you trusted those stones in Ferny dell to him ?'

'Now, Mary, you must keep his secret !'

'But why was it made one ? Did you think it unkind to say that it was his fault ?'

'Of course I did. When I thought it was all over with me, I could not go and charge the poor fellow with it, so as to make

him a marked man. I was only afraid that thinking so often of stopping myself, I should bring it out by mistake.'

Mary looked down, and thought; then raised her eyes suddenly, and said, as if surprised, 'That was really very noble in you, Louis!' Then, thinking on, she said, 'But how few people would think it worth while!'

'Yes,' said Louis; 'but I had a real regard for this poor fellow, and an instinct, perhaps perverse, of shielding him; so I could not accuse him on my own account. Besides, I believe I am far more guilty towards him. His neglect only hurt my ankle—my neglect left him to fall into temptation.'

'Yet, by the way he talks of you—'

'Yes, he has the sort of generous disposition on which a little delicacy makes a thousand times more impression than a whole pile of benefits. I hope and trust that he is going to repair all that is past. I wish I could make out whether good intentions overrule errors in detail, or only make them more fatal.'

Mary was glad to reason on the question. Abstract practical views interested her, and she had much depth and observation, more original than if she had read more and thought less. Of course, no conclusion was arrived at; but the two cousins had an argument of much enjoyment and some advantage to both.

Affairs glided on quietly till the Saturday, when Lord Ormersfield returned. Never had he so truly known what it was to come home as when he mounted the stairs, with steps unlike his usual measured tread, and beheld his son's look of animated welcome, and eager outstretched hands.

'I was afraid,' said the Earl, presently, 'that you had not felt so well;' and he touched his own upper lip to indicate that the same feature in his son was covered with down like a young bird.

Louis blushed a little, but spoke indifferently. 'I thought it a pity not to leave it for the regulation moustache for the Yeomanry.'

'I wish I could think you likely to be fit to go out with the Yeomanry.'

'Every effort must be made,' cried Louis. 'What do they say in London about the invasion?'

It was the year 1847, when a French invasion was in every one's mouth, and Sydney Calcott had been retailing all sorts of facts about war-steamers and artillery, in a visit to Fitzjocelyn, whose patriotism had forthwith run mad, so that he looked quite baffled when his father coolly set the whole down as 'the regular ten years' panic.' There was a fervid glow within him of awe, courage, and enterprise, the outward symbol of which was that infant yellow moustache. He was obliged, however, to allow the subject to be dismissed, while his father told him of Sir Miles Oakstead's kind inquiries, and gave a message of greeting from his aunt, Lady Conway, delivering himself of it

as an unpleasant duty, and adding, as he turned to Mrs. Ponsonby, 'She desired to be remembered to you, Mary.'

'I have not seen her for many years. Is Sir Walter alive?'

'No; he died about three years ago.'

'I suppose her daughters are not come out yet?'

'Her own are in the schoolroom; but there is a step-daughter who is much admired.'

'Those cousins of mine,' exclaimed Louis; 'it is strange that I have never seen them. I think I had better employ some of my spare time this summer in making their acquaintance.'

Mrs. Ponsonby perceived that the Earl had become inspired with a deadly terror of the handsome step-daughter; for he turned aside and began to unpack a parcel. It was M'Culloch's *Natural Theology*, into which Louis had once dipped at Mr. Calcott's, and had expressed a wish to read it. His father had taken some pains to procure this too-scarce book for him, and he seized on it with delighted and surprised gratitude, plunging at once into the middle, and reading aloud a most eloquent passage upon electricity. No beauty, however, could atone to Lord Ormersfield for the outrage upon method. 'If you would oblige me, Louis,' he said, 'you would read that book consecutively.'

'To oblige you, certainly,' said Louis, smiling, and turning to the first page; but his vivacious eagerness was extinguished.

M'Culloch is not an author to be thoroughly read without a strong effort. His gems are of the purest ray, but they lie embedded in a hard crust of reasoning and disquisition; and on the first morning, Louis, barely strong enough yet for a battle with his own volatility, looked, and owned himself, dead beat by the first chapter.

Mary took pity on him. She had been much interested by his account of the work, and would be delighted if he would read it with her. He brightened at once, and the regular habit began, greatly to their mutual enjoyment. Mary liked the argument, Louis liked explaining it; and the flood of allusions was delightful to both, with his richness of illustration, and Mary's actual experience of ocean and mountains. She brought him whatever books he wanted, and from the benevolent view of entertaining him while a prisoner, came to be more interested than her mother had ever expected to see her in anything literary. It was amusing to see the two cousins unconsciously educating each other—the one learning expansion, the other concentration, of mind. Mary could now thoroughly trust Louis's goodness, and therefore began by bearing with his vagaries, and gradually tracing the grain of wisdom that was usually at their root; and her eyes were open to new worlds, where all was not evil or uninteresting that Aunt Melicent distrusted. Louis made her teach him Spanish; and his insight into grammar and keen delight in the majestic language and rich literature infected her, while he was amused by her positive distaste to anything

incomplete, and playfully, though half-murmuringly, submitted to his 'good governess,' and let her keep him in excellent order. She knew where all his property was, and, in her quaint, straightforward way, would refuse to give him whatever 'was not good for him.'

It was all to oblige Mary that, when he could sit up and use pen and pencil, he set to work to finish his cottage plans, and soon drew and talked himself into a vehement condition about Marksedge. Mary's patronage drew on the work, even to hasty learning of perspective enough for a pretty elevation intelligible to the unlearned, and a hopeless calculation of the expense.

The plans lay on the table when next his father came home, and their interest was explained.

'Did you draw all these yourself?' exclaimed the Earl. 'Where did you learn architectural drawing? I should have thought them done by a professional hand.'

'It is easy enough to get it up from books,' said Louis; 'and Mary kept me to the point, in case you should be willing to consider the matter. I would have written out the estimate; but this book allows for bricks, and we could use the stone at Inglewood more cheaply, to say nothing of beauty.'

'Well,' said Lord Ormersfield, considering, 'you have every right to have a voice in the management of the property. I should like to hear your views with regard to these cottages.'

Colouring deeply, and with earnest thanks, Fitzjocelyn stated the injury both to labourers and employers, caused by their distance from their work; he explained where he thought the buildings ought to stand, and was even guarded enough to show that the rents would justify the outlay. He had considered the matter so much, that he could even have encountered Richardson; and his father was only afraid that what was so plausible *must* be insecure. Caution contended with a real desire to gratify his son, and to find him in the right. He must know the wishes of the farmer, be sure of the cost, and be certain of the spot intended. His crippled means had estranged him from duties that he could not fulfil according to his wishes; and, though not a hard landlord, he had no intercourse with his tenants, took little interest in his estate, and was such a stranger to the localities, that Louis could not make him understand the nook selected for the buildings. He had seen the arable field called 'Great Courtiers,' and the farm called 'Small Profits,' on the map, but did not know their ups and downs much better than the coast of China.

'Mary knows them!' said Louis. 'She made all my measurements there, before I planned the gardens.'

'Mary seems to be a good friend to your designs,' said the Earl, looking kindly at her.

'The best!' said Louis. 'I begin to have some hope of my doings when I see her take them in hand.'

Lord Ormersfield thanked Mary, and asked whether it would

be trespassing too much on her kindness to ask her to show him the place in question. She was delighted, and they set out at once, the Earl almost overpowering her by his exceeding graciousness, so that she was nearly ready to laugh when he complimented her on knowing her way through the by-paths of his own park so much better than he did. 'It is a great pleasure to me that you can feel it something like home,' he said.

'I was so happy here as a child,' said Mary, heartily, 'that it must seem to me more of a home than any other place.'

'I hope it may always be so, my dear.'

He checked himself, as if he had been about to speak even more warmly; and Mary did the honours of the proposed site for the cottages, a waste strip fronting a parish lane, open to the south, and looking full of capabilities, all of which she pointed out after Louis's well-learned lesson, as eagerly as if it had been her own affair.

Lord Ormersfield gave due force to all, but still was prudent. 'I must find out,' he said, 'whether this place be in my hands, or included in Norris's lease. You see, Mary, this is an encumbered property, with every disadvantage, so that I cannot always act as you and Louis would wish; but we so far see our way out of our difficulties, that, if guided by good sense, he will be able to effect far more than I have ever done.'

'I believe,' was Mary's answer, 'this green is in the farmer's hands, but that he has no use for it.'

'I should like to be certain of his wishes. Farmers are so unwilling to increase the rates, that I should not like to consent till I know that it would be really a convenience to him.'

Mary suggested that there stood the farmhouse; and the Earl apologetically asked if she would dislike their proceeding thither, as he would not detain her long. She eagerly declared that Louis would be 'so glad,' and Lord Ormersfield turned his steps to the door, where he had only been once in his life, when he was a very young man, trying to like shooting.

The round-eyed little maid would say nothing but 'Walk in, sir,' in answer to inquiries if Mr. Norris were at home; and they walked into a parlour, chill with closed windows, and as stiff and fine as the lilac streamers of the cap that Mrs. Norris had just put on for their reception. Nevertheless, she was a sensible, well-mannered woman, and after explaining that her husband was close at hand, showed genuine warmth and interest in inquiring for Lord Fitzjocelyn. As the conversation began to flag, Mary had recourse to admiring a handsome silver tankard on a side table. It was the prize of a ploughing-match eight years ago, and brought out a story that evidently always went with it, how Mrs. Norris had been unwell and stayed at home, and had first heard of her husband's triumph by seeing the young lord galloping headlong up the home field, hurraing, and waving his cap. He had taken his pony the instant he heard the decision, and rushed off to be the first to bring the news to

Mrs. Norris, wild with the honour of Small Profits. 'And,' said the farmer's wife, 'I always say Norris was as pleased with what I told him, as I was with the tankard!'

Norris here came in, an unpretending, quiet man, of the modern, intelligent race of farmers. There was anxiety at first in his eye, but it cleared off as he heard the cause of his landlord's visit, and he was as propitious as any cautious farmer could be. He was strong on the present inconveniences, and agreed that it would be a great boon to have a *few* families brought back, such as were steady, and would not burden the rates; but the *few* recurred so often as to show that he was afraid of a general migration of Marksedge. Lord Ormersfield thereupon promised that he should be consulted as to the individuals.

'Thank you, my lord. There are some families at Marksedge that one would not wish to see nearer here; and I'll not say but I should like to have a voice in the matter, for they are apt to take advantage of Lord Fitzjocelyn's kindness.'

'I quite understand you. Nothing can be more reasonable. I only acted because my son was persuaded it was your wish.'

'It is so, my lord. I am greatly obliged. He has often talked of it with me, and I had mentioned the matter to Mr. Richardson, but he thought your lordship would be averse to doing anything.'

'I have not been able to do all I could have wished,' said the Earl. 'My son will have it in his power to turn more attention to the property.'

'And he *is* a thorough farmer's friend, as they all say,' earnestly exclaimed Norris, with warmth breaking through the civil formal manner.

'True,' said Lord Ormersfield, gratified; 'he is very much attached to the place, and all connected with it.'

'I'm sure they're the same to him,' replied the farmer. 'As an instance, my lord, you'll excuse it—do you see that boy driving in the cows? You would not look for much from him. Well, the morning the doctor from London came down, that boy came to his work, crying so that I thought he was ill. "No, master," said he, "but what'll ever become of us when we've lost my young lord?" And he burst out again, fit to break his heart. I told him I was sorry enough myself, but to go to his work, for crying would do no good. "I can't help it, master," says he, "when I looks at the pigs. Didn't he find 'em all in the park, and me nutting—and helped me his own self to drive 'em out before Mr. Warren see 'em, and lifted the little pigs over the gap as tender as if they were Christians?"'

'Yes, that's the way with them all,' interposed Mrs. Norris: 'he has the good word of high and low!'

Lord Ormersfield smiled—he smiled better than he used to do—and took leave.

'Fitzjocelyn will be a popular man,' he said.

Mary could not help being diverted at this moral deduced

from the pig-story. 'Every one is fond of him,' was all she said.

'Talent and popularity,' continued the Earl. 'He will have great influence. The free, prepossessing manner is a great advantage, where it is so natural and devoid of effort.'

'It comes of his loving every one,' said Mary, almost indignantly.

'It is a decided advantage,' continued the Earl, complacently. 'I have no doubt but that he has every endowment requisite for success. You and your mother have done much in developing his character, my dear; and I see every reason to hope that the same influence continued will produce the most beneficial results.'

Mary thought this a magnificent compliment, even considering that no one but her mamma had succeeded in teaching Louis to read when a little boy, or in making him persevere in anything now: but then, when Lord Ormersfield did pay a compliment, it was always in the style of Louis XIV.

CHAPTER IX

THE FAMILY COMPACT

Who, nurst with tender care,
And to domestic bounds confined,
Was still a wild Jack-hare.—COWPER

'MARY,' said Mrs. Frost.

Mrs. Ponsonby was sitting by the open window of the library, inhaling the pleasant scents of July. Raising her eyes, she saw her aunt gazing at her with a look somewhat perplexed, but brimful of mischievous frolic. However, the question was only, 'Where is that boy?'

'He is gone down with Mary to his cottage-building.'

'Oh! if Mary is with him, I don't care,' said Aunt Catharine, sitting down to her knitting; but her ball seemed restless, and while she pursued it, she broke out into a little laugh, and exclaimed, 'I beg your pardon, my dear, but I cannot help it. I never heard anything so funny!'

'As this scheme,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, with a little hesitation.

'Then you have the other side of it in your letter,' cried Mrs. Frost, giving way to her merriment. 'The *Arabian Nights* themselves; the two viziers laying their heads together, and sending home orders to us to make up the match!'

'My letter does not go so far,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, amused, but anxious.

'Yours is the lady's side. My orders are precise. Oliver has talked it over with Mr. Ponsonby, and finds the connection would be agreeable; so he issues a decree that his nephew, Roland Dynevor—(poor Jem—he would not know himself!)—

should enter on no profession, but forthwith pay his addresses to Miss Ponsonby, since he will shortly be in a position befitting the heir of our family !'

'You leave Prince Roland in happy ignorance,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, blushing a little.

'Certainly—or he would fly off like a sky-rocket at the first symptom of the princess.'

'Then I think we need not alter our plans. All that Mary's father tells me is, that he does not intend to return home as yet, though his successor is appointed, since he is much occupied by this new partnership with Oliver, and expects that the investment will be successful. He quite approves of our living at the Terrace, especially as he thinks I ought to be informed that Oliver has declared his intentions with regard to his nephew ; and so if anything should arise between the young people, I am not to discourage it.'

'Mary is in request,' said Mrs. Frost, slyly ; and as she met Mrs. Ponsonby's eyes full of uneasy inquiry, 'You don't mean that you have not observed at least his elder lordship's most decided courtship ? Don't be too innocent, my dear.'

'Pray don't say so, Aunt Kitty, or you will make me uncomfortable in staying here. If the like ever crossed his mind, he must perceive that the two are just what we were together ourselves.'

'That might make him wish it the more,' Aunt Catharine had almost said ; but she restrained it half-way, and said, 'Louis is hardly come to the time of life for a *grande passion*.'

'True. He is wonderfully young ; and Mary not only seems much older, but is by no means the girl to attract a mere youth. I rather suspect she will have no courtship but from the elders.'

'In spite of her opportunities. What would some mammas—Lord Ormersfield's bugbear, for instance, Lady Conway—give for such a chance ! Three months of a lame young lord, and such a lame young lord as my Louis !'

'I might have feared,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, 'if Mary were not so perfectly simple. Aunt Melicent managed to abstract all romance, and I never regretted it so little. She has looked after him merely because it came in her way as a form of kindness, and is too much his governess for anything of the other sort.'

'So you really do not wish for the other sort ?' said Mrs. Frost, half mortified, as if it were a slight to her boy.

'I don't know how her father might take it,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, eager to disarm her. 'With his grand expectations, and his view of the state of this property, he might make difficulties. He is fond of expressing his contempt for needy nobility ; and I am afraid, after all that has passed, that this would be the last case in which he would make an exception.'

'Yet you say he is fond of Mary.'

'Very fond. If anything would triumph over his dislike, it would be his affection for her; but I had rather my poor Mary had not to put it to the proof. And, after all, I don't think it the safest way for a marriage, that the man should be the most attractive, and the woman the most—'

'Sensible! Say it, Mary—that is the charm in my nephew's eyes.'

'Your *great-nephew* is the point! No, no, Aunt Kitty; you are under a delusion. The kindness to Mary is no more than "auld lang-syne," and because he thinks her too impossible. He cannot afford for his son to marry anything but a grand unquestionable heiress. Mary's fortune, besides, depending on speculations, would be nothing to what Lady Fitzjocelyn ought to have.'

'For shame! I think better of him. I believe he would be unworldly when Louis's happiness was concerned.'

'To return to James,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, decidedly: 'I am glad that his uncle should have declared his intentions.'

'Oh, my dear, we are quite used to that. I am only glad that Jem takes no heed. We have had enough of that!—For my own part,' and the tears arose, 'I never expect that poor Oliver will think he has done enough in my lifetime. These things do so grow on a man! If I had but kept him at home!'

'It might have been the same.'

'There would have been something to divide his attention. His brother used to be a sort of idol; he seemed to love him the more for his quiet, easy ways, and to delight in waiting on him. I do believe he delays because he cannot bear to come home without Henry!'

Mrs. Ponsonby preferred most topics to that of Mrs. Frost's sons, and was relieved by the sight of the young people returning across the lawn—Fitzjocelyn with his ash stick, but owing a good deal of support to Mary's firm, well-knit arm. They showed well together: even lameness could not disfigure the grace of his leisurely movements; and the bright changefulness and delicacy of his face contrasted well with the placid nobleness of her composed expression, while her complexion was heightened and her eyes lighted by exercise, so that she was almost handsome. She certainly had been looking uncommonly well lately. Was this the way they were to walk together through life?

But Mrs. Ponsonby had known little of married life save the troubles, and she was doubly anxious for her daughter's sake. She exceedingly feared unformed characters, and natures that had no root in themselves. Mary's husband must not lean on her for strength.

She was glad, as, with new meaning, she watched their proceedings, to see how easily, and as a matter of course, Louis let Mary bring his footstool and his slippers, fetch his books, each at the proper time, read Spanish with him, and make him look out the words in the dictionary when he knew them by

intuition, remind him of orders to be written for his buildings, and manage him as her pupil. If she ruled, it was with perfect calmness and simplicity, and the playfulness was that of brother and sister, not even with the coquettish intimacy of cousinhood.

The field was decidedly open to Roland Dynevor, *alias* James Frost.

Mrs. Ponsonby was loth to contemplate that contingency, though, in all obedience, she exposed her daughter to the infection. He was expected on that afternoon, bringing his sister with him, for he had not withstood the united voices that entreated him to become Fitzjocelyn's tutor during the vacation, and the whole party had promised to remain for the present as guests at Ormersfield.

Louis, in high spirits, offered to drive Mrs. Ponsonby to meet the travellers at the station; and much did he inflict on her poor shattered nerves by the way. He took no servant, that there might be the more room, and perched aloft on the driving seat, he could only use his indefatigable tongue by leaning back with his head turned round to her. She kept a sharp look-out ahead; but all her warnings of coming perils only caused him to give a moment's attention to the horses and the reins, before he again turned backwards to resume his discourse. In the town, his head was more in the right direction, for he was nodding and returning greetings every moment; he seemed to have a bowing acquaintance with all the world, and when he drew up at the station, reached down several times to shake hands with figures whom his father would barely have acknowledged; exchanging good-humoured inquiries or congratulations with almost every third person.

Scarcely had the train dashed up before Mrs. Ponsonby was startled by a shout of 'He's there himself! Louis! Louis!' and felt, as well as saw, the springing ascent to the box of a tall apparition, in a scanty lilac cotton dress, an outgrown black mantle, and a brown straw bonnet, scarcely confining an overprofusion of fair hair. Louis let go the reins to catch hold of both hands, and cry, 'Well, old Giraffe! what have you done with Jem?'

'Seeing to the luggage! You won't let him turn me out! I must sit here!'

'You *must* have manners,' said Louis; 'look round, and speak rationally to Mrs. Ponsonby.'

'I never saw she was there!' and slightly colouring, the 'Giraffe' erected her length, turned round a small insignificant face slightly freckled, with hazel eyes, as light as if they had been gray, and stretched down a hand to be shaken by her new relation; but she was chiefly bent on retaining her elevation.

'There, Jem!' she cried exultingly, as he came forth, followed by the trunks and portmanteaus.

'Madcap!' he said; 'but I suppose the first day of the holi-

days must be privileged. Ha! Fitzjocelyn, you're the right man in the right place, whatever Clara is.'

So they drove off, James sitting by Mrs. Ponsonby, and taking care to inform her that, in spite of her preposterous height, Clara was only sixteen, he began to ask anxious questions as to Fitzjocelyn's recovery; while she looked up at the pair in front, and thought, from the appearance of things, that even Louis's tongue was more than rivalled, for the new-comer seemed to say a sentence in the time he took in saying a word. Poor Mrs. Ponsonby! she would not have been happier had she known in which pair of hands the reins were!

'And Louis! how are you?' cried Clara, as soon as this point had been gained; 'are you able to walk?'

'After a fashion.'

'And does your ankle hurt you?'

'Only if I work it too hard. One would think that lounging had become a virtue instead of a vice, to hear the way I am treated.'

'You look—' began Clara. 'But oh, Louis!' cried she in a sort of hesitating wonder, 'what! a moustache?'

'Don't say a word!' he lowered his voice. 'Riding is against orders; but I cannot miss the Yeomanry, under the present aspect of affairs.'

'The invasion! A man in the train was talking of the war steamers, but Jem laughed. Do you believe in it?'

'It is a time when a display of loyalty and national spirit may turn the scale. I am resolved to let no trifle prevent me from doing my part,' he said, colouring with enthusiasm.

'You are quite right,' cried Clara. 'You ought to take your vassals, like a feudal chief! I am sure the defence of one's country ought to outweigh everything.'

'Exactly so. Our volunteer forces are our strength and glory, and are a happy meeting of all classes in the common cause. But say nothing, Clara, or granny will take alarm, and get an edict from Walby against me.'

'Dear granny! But I wish we were going home to the Terrace.'

'Thank you. How flattering!'

'You would be always in and out, and it would be so much more comfortable. Is Lord Ormersfield at home?'

'No, he will not come till legislation can bear London no longer.'

'Oh!'—with a sound of great relief.

'You don't know how kind he has been,' said Louis, eagerly. 'You will find it out when you are in the house with him.'

Clara laughed, but sighed. 'I think we should have had more fun at home.'

'What! than with me for your host? Try what I can do. Besides, you overlook Mary.'

'But she has been at school!'

‘Well!’

‘I didn’t bargain for school-girls at home!’

‘I should not have classed Mary in that category.’

‘Don’t ask me to endure any one who has been at school! Oh, Louis! if you could only guess—if you would only speak to Jem not to send me back to that place—’

‘Aunt Kitty will not consent, I am sure, if you are really unhappy there, my poor Clara.’

‘No! no! I am ordered not to tell granny. It would only vex her, and Jem says it must be. I don’t want her to be vexed, and if I tell you, I may be able to keep it in!’

Out poured the whole flood of troubles, unequal in magnitude, but most trying to the high-spirited girl. Formal walks, silent meals, set manners, perpetual French, were a severe trial, but far worse was the companionship. Petty vanities, small disputes, fretful jealousies, insincere tricks, and sentimental secrets, seemed to Clara a great deal more contemptible than the ignorance, indolence, abrupt manners, and boyish tastes which brought her into constant disgrace—and there seemed to be one perpetual chafing and contradiction, which made her miserable. And a further confidence could not help following, though with a warning that Jem must not hear it, for she did not mind, and he spent every farthing on her that he could afford. She had been teased about her dress, told that her friends were mean and shabby, and rejected as a walking companion, because she had no parasol, and that was vulgar.

‘I am sure I wanted to walk with none of them,’ said Clara, ‘and when our English governess advised me to get one, I told her I would give in to no such nonsense, for only vulgar people cared about them. Such a scrape I got into! Well, then Miss Salter, whose father is a knight, and who thinks herself the great lady of the school, always bridled whenever she saw me, and, at last, Lucy Raynor came whispering up, to beg that I would contradict that my grandmamma kept a school, for Miss Salter was so very particular.’

‘I should like to have heard your contradiction.’

‘I never would whisper, least of all to Lucy Raynor, so I stood up in the midst, and said, as clear as I could, that my grandmother had always earned an honest livelihood by teaching little boys, and that I meant to do the same, for nothing would ever make me have anything to do with girls.’

‘That spoilt it,’ said Louis—‘the first half was dignified.’

‘What was the second?’

‘Human nature,’ said Louis.

‘I see,’ said Clara. ‘Well, they were famously scandalized, and that was all very nice, for they let me alone. But you brought far worse on me, Louis.’

‘I!’

‘Ay! ’Twas my own fault, though, but I couldn’t help it. You must know, they all are ready to bow down to the ninety

ninth part of a lord's little finger ; and Miss Brown—that's the teacher—always reads all the fashionable intelligence as if it were the *Arabian Nights*, and imparts little bits to Miss Salter and her pets ; and so it was that I heard, whispered across the table, the dreadful accident to Viscount Fitzjocelyn !'

'Did nobody write to you ?'

'Yes—I had a letter from granny, and another from Jem by the next morning's post, or I don't know what I should have done. Granny was too busy to write at first ; I didn't three parts believe it before, but there was no keeping in at that first moment.'

'What did you do ?'

'I gave one great scream, and flew at the newspaper. The worst was, that I had to explain, and then—oh ! it was enough to make one sick. Why had I not said I was Lord Ormersfield's cousin ? I turned into a fine aristocratic-looking girl on the spot ! Miss Salter came and fondled, and wanted me to walk with her !'

'Of course ; she had compassion on your distress—amiable feeling !'

'She only wanted to ask ridiculous questions, whether you were handsome.'

'What did you reply ?'

'I told them not a word, except that my brother was going to be your tutor. When I saw Miss Salter setting off by this line, I made Jem take second-class tickets, that she might be ashamed of me.'

'My dear Giraffe, bend down your neck, and don't take such a commonplace, conventional view of your schoolfellows.'

'Conventional ! ay, all agree because they know it by experience,' said Clara—'I'm sure I do !'

'Then take the other side—see the best.'

'Jem says you go too far, and are unreasonable with your theory of making the best of every one.'

'By no means. I always made the worst of Frampton, and now I know what injustice I did him. I never saw greater kindness and unselfishness than he has shown me.'

'I should like to know what best you would make of these girls !'

'You have to try that !'

'Can I get any possible good by staying ?'

'A vast deal.'

'I'm sure Italian, and music, and drawing are not a good compared with truth, and honour, and kindness.'

'All those things only grow by staying wherever we may happen to be, unless it is by our own fault.'

'Tell me what good you mean !'

'Learning not to hate, learning to mend your gloves. Don't jerk the reins, Clara, or you'll get me into a scrape.'

Clara could extract no more, nor did she wish it ; for having

relieved her mind by the overflow, she only wanted to forget her misfortunes. Her cousin Louis was her chief companion; they had always felt themselves on the same level of nonsense, and had unreservedly shared each other's confidences and projects; and ten thousand bits of intelligence were discussed with mutual ardour, while Clara's ecstasy became uncontrollable as she felt herself coming nearer to her grandmother. She finally descended with a bound almost as distressing to her brother as her ascent had been, and leapt at once to the embrace of Mrs. Frost, who stood there, petting, kissing her, and playfully threatening all sorts of means to stop her growth. Clara reared up her giraffe figure, boasting of having overtopped all the world present, except Louis! She made but a cold, abrupt response to her cousin Mary's greeting, and presently rushed up-stairs in search of dear old Jane, with an impetus that made Mrs. Frost sigh, and say, 'Poor child! how happy she is;' and follow her, smiling, while James looked annoyed.

'Never mind, Jem,' said Louis, who had thrown himself at full length on the sofa, 'she deserves compensation. Let it fizz.'

'And undo everything! What do you say to that, Mary?'

'Mary is to say nothing,' said Louis; 'I mean that poor child to have her swing.'

'I shall leave you and James to settle that,' said Mary, quitting them.

'I am very anxious that Clara should form a friendship with Mary,' said James, gravely.

'Friendships can't be crammed down people's throats,' said Louis, in a weary indifferent tone.

'You who have been three months with Mary——!'

'Mary and I did not meet with labels round our necks that here were a pair of friends. Pray do you mean to send that victim of yours back to school?'

'Don't set her against it. I have been telling her of the necessity all the way home.'

'Is it not to be taken into consideration that a bad—not to say a base—style of girl seems to prevail there?'

'I can't help it, Fitzjocelyn,' cried Jem, ruffling up his hair, as he always did when vexed. 'Girls fit to be her companions don't go to school—or to no school within my means. This place has sound superiors, and she *must* be provided with a marketable stock of accomplishments, so there's no choice. I can trust her not to forget that she is a Dynevore.'

'Query as to the benefit of that recollection.'

'What do you mean?'

'That I never saw evils lessened by private self-exaltation.'

'Very philosophical! but as a matter of fact, what was it but the sense of my birth that kept me out of all the mischief I was exposed to at the Grammar School?'

'I always thought it had been something more respectable,' said Louis, his voice growing more sleepy.

'Pshaw! Primary motives being understood, secondary stand common wear the best.'

'As long as they don't eat into the primary.'

'The long and short of it is,' exclaimed James, impatiently, 'that we must have no nonsense about Clara. It is pain enough to me to inflict all this on her, but I would not do it if I thought it were more than mere discomfort. Her principles are fixed, she is above these trumperies. But you have the sense to see that her whole welfare may depend on whether she gets fitted to be a valuable accomplished governess or a mere *bonne*, tossed about among nursery-maids. There's where poverty galls! Don't go and set my grandmother on! If she grew wretched and took Clara away, it would be mere condemning of her to rudeness and struggling!'

'Very well,' said Louis, as James concluded the brief sentences, uttered in the bitterness of his heart, 'one bargain I make. If I am to hold my tongue about school, I will have my own way with her in the holidays.'

'I tell you, Louis, that it is time to have done with childishness. Clara is growing up—I *won't* have you encourage her in all that wild flightiness—I didn't want to have had her here at all! If she is ever to be a reasonable, conformable woman, it is high time to begin. I can't have you undoing the work of six months! when Mary might make some hand of her too—'

James stopped. Louis's eyes were shut, and he appeared to be completely asleep. If silence were acquiescence, it was at least gained; and so he went away, and on returning, intended to impress his lessons of reserve on Clara and her grandmother, but was prevented by finding Mrs. Ponsonby and her daughter already in the library, consulting over some letters, while Clara sat at her grandmother's knee in the full felicity of hearing all the Northwold news.

The tea was brought in, and there was an inquiry for Louis. He came slowly forward from the sofa at the dark end of the room, but disclaimed, of course, the accusation of fatigue.

'A very bad sign,' said James, 'that you have been there all this time without our finding it out. Decidedly, you have taken me in. You don't look half as well as you promised. You are not the same colour ten minutes together; just now white, and now—how you redden!'

'Don't, Jem!' cried Louis, as each observation renewed the tide of burning crimson in his cheek. 'It is like whistling to a turkey-cock. If I had but the blue variety, it might be more comfortable, as well as more interesting.'

Clara went into a choking paroxysm of laughter, which her brother tried to moderate by a look, and Louis rendered more convulsive by quoting

'Marked you his cheek of heavenly blue,'

and looked with a mischievous amusement at James's ill-sup-

pressed displeasure at the merriment that knew no bounds, till even Mrs. Frost, who had laughed at first as much at James's distress as at Louis's travesty or Clara's fun, thought it time to check it by saying, 'You are right, Jem, he is not half so strong as he thinks himself. You must keep him in good order.'

'Take care, Aunt Kitty,' said Louis; 'you'll make me restive. A tutor and governess both! I appeal! Shall we endure it, Clara?'

'Britons never shall be slaves!' was the eager response.

'Worthy of the daughter of the Pendragons,' said Louis; 'but it lost half its effect from being stifled with laughing. You should command yourself, Clara, when you utter a sentiment. I beg to repeat Miss Frost Dynevor's novel and striking speech, and declare my adhesion, "Britons never shall be slaves!" Liberty, fraternity, and equality! Tyrants, beware!'

'You ungrateful boy!' said Mrs. Frost; 'that's the way you use your good governess!'

'Only the way the nineteenth century treats all its good governesses,' said Louis.

'When it gets past them,' said Mary, smiling. 'I hope you did not think I was not ready to give you up to your tutor?'

Mary found the renunciation more complete than perhaps she had expected. The return of his cousins had made Fitzjocelyn a different creature. He did indeed read with James for two hours every morning, but this was his whole concession to discipline; otherwise he was more wayward and desultory than ever, and seemed bent on teasing James, and amusing himself by making Clara extravagantly wild and idle. Tired of his long confinement, he threw off all prudence with regard to health, as well as all struggle with his volatile habits; and the more he was scolded, the more he seemed to delight in making meekly ridiculous answers and going his own way. Sometimes he and Clara would make an appointment, at some unearthly hour, to see Mrs. Norris make cheese, or to find the sun-dew blossom open, or to sketch some effect of morning sun. Louis would afterwards be tired and unhinged the whole day, but never convinced, only capable of promoting Clara's chatter; and ready the next day to stand about with her in the sun at the cottages, to the increase of her freckles, and the detriment of his ankle. Their frolics would have been more comprehensible had she been more attractive; but her boisterous spirits were not engaging to any one but Louis, who seemed to enjoy them in proportion to her brother's annoyance, and to let himself down into nearly equal folly.

He gave some slight explanation to Mary, one day when he had been reminded of one of their former occupations—'Ah! I have no time for that now. You see there's nobody else to protect that poor Giraffe from being too rational.'

'Is that her great danger?' said Mary.

'Take my advice, Mary, let her alone. Follow your own

judgment, and not poor Jem's fidgets. He wants to be "father, mother both, and uncle, all in one," and so he misses his natural vocation of elder brother. He wants to make a woman of her before her time; and now he has his way with her at school, he *shall* let her have a little compensation at home.'

'Is this good for her? Is it the only way she can be happy?'

'It is her way, at least; and if you knew the penance she undergoes at school, you would not grudge it to her. She is under his orders not to disclose the secrets of her prison-house, lest they should disquiet Aunt Catharine; and she will not turn to you, because—I beg your pardon, Mary—she has imbibed a distrust of all school-girls; and besides, Jem has gone and insisted on your being her friend more than human nature can stand.'

'It is a great pity,' said Mary, smiling, but grieved; 'I should not have been able to do her much good—but if I could only try!'

'I'll tell you,' said Louis, coming near, with a look between confidence and embarrassment; 'is it in the power of woman to make her dress look rather more like other people's without inflaming the blood of the Dynevors—cautiously, you know? Even my father does not dare to give her half-a-sovereign for pocket-money; but do ask your mother if she could not be made such that those girls should not make her their laughing-stock.'

'You don't mean it?'

'Aye, I do; and she has not even told James, lest he should wish to spend more upon her. She glories in it, but that is hardly wholesome.'

'Then she told you?'

'Oh, yes! We always were brothers! It is great fun to have her here. I always wished it, and I'm glad it has come before they have made her get out of the boy. He will be father to the woman some day; and that will be soon enough, without teasing her.'

Mary wished to ask whether all this were for Clara's good, but she could not very well put such a question to him; and, after all, it was noticeable that, noisy and unguarded as Clara's chatter was, there never was anything that in itself should not have been said: though her manner with Louis was unceremonious, it was never flirting; and refinement of mind was as evident in her rough-and-ready manner as in his high-bred quietness. This seemed to account for Mrs. Frost's non-interference, which at first amazed her niece; but Aunt Catharine's element was chiefly with boys, and her love for Clara, though very great, showed itself chiefly in still regarding her as a mere child, petting her to atone for the privations of school, and while she might assent to the propriety of James's restrictions, always laughing or looking aside when they were eluded.

James argued and remonstrated. He said a great deal, always had the advantage in vehemence, and appeared to reduce Louis

to a condition of quaint *debonnaire* indifference ; and warfare seemed the normal state of the cousins, the one fiery and sensitive, the other cool and impassive, and yet as appropriate to each other as the pepper and the cucumber, to borrow a *bon mot* from their neighbour, Sydney Calcott.

If Jem came to Mary brimful of annoyance with Louis's folly, a mild word of assent was sufficient to make him turn round and do battle with the imaginary enemy who was always depreciating Fitzjocelyn. To make up for Clara's avoidance of Mary, he rendered her his prime counsellor, and many an hour was spent in pacing up and down the garden in the summer twilight ; while she did her best to pacify him by suggesting that thorough relaxation would give spirits and patience for Clara's next half-year, and that it might be wiser not to overstrain his own undefined authority, while the lawful power, Aunt Catherine, did not interfere. Surely she might safely be trusted to watch over her own granddaughter ; and while Clara was so perfectly simple, and Louis such as he was, more evil than good might result from inculcating reserve. At any rate, it was hard to meddle with the poor child's few weeks of happiness, and to this James always agreed ; and then he came the next day to relieve himself by fighting the battle over again. So constantly did this occur, that Aunt Kitty, in her love of mischief, whispered to Mrs. Ponsonby that she only hoped the two viziers would not quarrel about the three thousand sequins, three landed estates, and three slaves.

Still, Louis's desertion had left unoccupied so many of the hours of Mary's time that he had previously absorbed, that her mother watched anxiously to see whether she would feel the blank. But she treated it as a matter of course. She had attended to her cousin when he needed her, and now that he had regained his former companion, Clara, she resigned him without effort or mortification, as far as could be seen. She was forced to fall back on other duties, furnishing the house, working for every one, and reading some books that Louis had brought before her. The impulse of self-improvement had not expired with his attention, and without any shadow of pique she was always ready to play the friend and elder sister whenever he needed her, and to be grateful when he shared her interests or pursuits. So the world went till Lord Ormersfield's return caused Clara's noise to subside so entirely, that her brother was sufficiently at ease to be exceedingly vivacious and entertaining, and Mrs. Ponsonby hoped for a great improvement in the state of affairs.

CHAPTER X.

THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR

For who is he, whose chin is but enriched
 With one appearing hair, that will not follow
 These culled and choice-drawn cavaliers 'gainst France?
 Work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege.—*King Henry V.*

THE next forenoon, Mary met James in the park, wandering in search of his pupil, whom he had not seen since they had finished their morning's work in the study. Some wild freak with Clara was apprehended, but while they were conferring, Mary exclaimed, 'What's that?' as a clatter and clank met her ear.

'Only the men going out to join old Brewster's ridiculous yeomanry,' said Jem.

'Oh, I should like to see them,' cried Mary, running to the top of a bank, whence she could see into the hollow road leading from the stables to the lodge. Four horsemen, the sun glancing on their helmets, were descending the road, and a fifth, at some distance ahead, was nearly out of sight. 'Ah,' she said, 'Louis must have been seeing them off. How disappointed he must be not to go!'

'I wish I was sure—' said James, with a start. 'I declare his folly is capable of anything! Why did I not think of it sooner?'

Clara here rushed upon them with her camelopard gallop, sending her voice before her—'Can you see them?'

'Scarcely,' said Mary, making room for her.

'Where's Louis?' hastily demanded her brother.

'Gone to the yeomanry meeting,' said Clara, looking in their faces in the exultation of producing a sensation.

James was setting off with a run to intercept him, but it was too late; and Clara loudly laughed as she said, 'You can't catch him.'

'I've done with him!' cried James. 'Can madness go further?'

'James! I am ashamed of you,' cried the Giraffe, with great stateliness. 'Here are the enemy threatening our coasts, and our towns full of disaffection and sedition; and when our yeomanry are lukewarm enough to go off grouse-shooting instead of attending to their duty, what is to become of the whole country if somebody does not make an exertion? The tranquillity of all England may depend on the face our yeomanry show.'

'On Lieutenant Fitzjocelyn's yellow moustache! Pray how long have you been in the secret of these heroic intentions?'

'Ever since I came home.'

'We all knew that he meant to go out if he could,' said Mary, in a tone calculated to soothe Jem, and diminish Clara's glory in being sole confidante, 'but we did not think him well enough. I hope it will do him no harm.'

'Exertions in a good cause can do no harm!' boldly declared Clara; then, with sudden loss of confidence, 'do you really think it will?'

'Just cripple him for life,' said James.

'Mr. Walby wished him not to attempt riding,' said Mary. 'He thinks any strain on the ankle just now might hurt him very much; but it may be over caution.'

'Mr. Walby is an old woman,' said Clara. 'Now, Jem, you said so yourself. Besides, it is all for his duty! Of course, he would risk anything for the good of his country.'

'Don't say another word, Clara,' exclaimed James, 'or you will drive me distracted with your folly. One grain of sense, and even you would have stopped it; but neither you nor he could miss a chance of his figuring in that masquerade dress! Look at the sun! exactly like a red-hot oven! We shall have him come home as ill as ever!'

Clara had another milder and more sorrowful version of the scolding from her grandmother; but Lord Ormersfield escaped the day's anxiety by being so busy with Richardson, that he never emerged from the study, and did not miss his son.

It was an exceedingly sultry day, and the hopeful trusted that Louis would be forced to give in, before much harm could be done; but it was not till five o'clock that the hoofs were heard on the gravel; and Jem went out to revenge himself with irony for his uneasiness.

'I hope you are satisfied,' he said; '*dulce est pro patria mori.*'

Louis was slowly dismounting, and as he touched the ground gave a slight cry of pain, and caught at the servant's arm for support.

'No more than I expected,' said James, coming to help him; and at the same moment Lord Ormersfield was heard exclaiming—

'Fitzjocelyn! what imprudence!'

'Take care,' hastily interrupted James, finding Louis leaning helplessly against him, unable to speak or stand, and his flushed cheek rapidly changing to deadly white.

They lifted him up the steps into the hall, where he signed to be laid down on the seat of the cool north window; and trying to smile, said, 'it was only the hot sun, and his foot aching rather; it would soon go off.' And when, with much pain and difficulty, Frampton had released his swollen foot from the regulation boot, into which he had foolishly thrust it, he went on more fluently. 'He had thought it his duty, especially when Mr. Shaw, the captain of his troop, had chosen to go away—he had believed it could do no harm—he was sure it was only a little present discomfort, and in the present crisis—'

He addressed his aunt, but his eyes were on his father; and when he heard not a single word from him, he suddenly ceased, and presently, laying his head down on the window-sill, he begged that no one would stand and watch him; he should come into the library in a few minutes.

The few minutes lasted, however, till near dinner-time, when he called to Mary, as she was coming down-stairs, and asked her to help him into the library ; he could remain no longer exposed to Frampton's pity, as dinner went in.

He dragged himself along with more difficulty than he had found for weeks, and sank down on the sofa with a sigh of exhaustion ; while Clara, who was alone in the room, reared herself up from an easy-chair, where she had been sitting in an attitude that would have been despair to her mistress.

'Ha, Clara !' said Louis, presently ; 'you look as if you had been the object of invective !'

'I don't care,' exclaimed Clara ; 'I know you were in the good old cause.'

'Condé at Jarnac, Charles XII. at Pultowa—which ?' said Louis. 'I thought of both myself—only, unluckily, I made such frightful blunders. I was thankful to my men for bringing me off, like other great commanders.'

'Oh, Louis ! but at least you were in your place—you set the example.'

'Unluckily, these things descend from the sublime to the other thing, when one is done up, and beginning to doubt whether self-will cannot sometimes wear a mask.'

'I'm sure they are all quite cross enough to you already, without your being cross to yourself.'

'An ingenious and elegant impersonal,' said Louis.

Clara rushed out into the garden to tell the stiff old rose-trees that if Lord Ormersfield were savage now, he would be more horrid than ever.

Meanwhile Louis drew a long sigh, murmuring, 'Have I gone and vexed him again ? Mary, have I been very silly ?'

The half-piteous doubt and compunction had something childish, which made her smile as she answered : 'You had better have done as you were told.'

'The surest road to silliness,' said Louis, whose tendency was to moralize the more, the more tired he was, 'is to think one is going to do something fine ! It is dismal work to come out at the other end of an illusion.'

'With a foot aching as, I am afraid, yours does.'

'I should not mind that, but that I made such horrid mistakes !'

These weighed upon his mind so much, that he went on, half aloud, rehearsing the manœuvres and orders in which he had failed, from the difficulty of taking the command of his troop for the first time, when bewildered with pain and discomfort. The others came in, and James looked rabid ; Louis stole a glance now and then at his father, who preserved a grave silence ; while Clara stood aloof, comparing the prostrate figure in blue and silver to all the wounded knights in history or fiction.

He was past going in to dinner, and the party were 'civil and melancholy,' Mrs. Frost casting beseeching looks at her grandson, who sat visibly chafing at the gloom that rested on the

Earl's brow, and which increased at each message of refusal of everything but iced water. At last Mrs. Frost carried off some grapes from the dessert to tempt him, and as she passed through the open window—her readiest way to the library—the Earl's thanks concluded with a disconsolate murmur 'quite ill,' and 'abominable folly'; a mere soliloquy and nearly inaudible, but sufficient spark to produce the explosion.

'Fitzjocelyn's motives deserve no such name as folly,' James cried, with stammering eagerness.

'I know you did not encourage him,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'I did,' said a young, clear voice, raised in alarm at her own boldness; 'Jem knew nothing of it, but I thought it right.'

Lord Ormersfield made a little courteous inclination with his head, which annihilated Clara upon the spot.

'I doubt whether I should have done right in striving to prevent him,' said James. 'Who can appreciate the moral effect of heroism?'

'Heroism in the cause of a silver jacket!'

'Now, that is the most unfair thing in the world!' cried James, always most violent when he launched out with his majestic cousin. 'There is not a man living more careless of his appearance. You do him justice, Mrs. Ponsonby?'

'Yes, I do not believe that vanity had anything to do with it. A man who would bear what he has done to-day would do far more.'

'If it had been for any reasonable cause,' said the Earl.

'You may not understand it, Lord Ormersfield,' exclaimed James, 'but I do. In these times of disaffection, a sound heart, and whole spirit, in our volunteer corps may be the saving of the country; and who can tell what may be the benefit of such an exhibition of self-sacrificing zeal. The time demands every man's utmost, and neither risk nor suffering can make him flinch from his duty.'

'My dear Jem,' said a voice behind him at the window, 'I never see my follies so plainly as when you are defending them. Come and help me up-stairs; granny is ordering me up; a night's rest will set all smooth.'

It was not a night's rest, neither did it set things smooth. In vain did Louis assume a sprightly countenance, and hold his head and shoulders erect and stately; there was no concealing that he was very pale, and winced at every step. His ankle had been much hurt by the pressure of the stirrup, and he was not strong enough to bear with impunity severe pain, exertion, and fatigue on a burning summer day. It was evident that his recovery had been thrown back for weeks.

His father made no reproaches, but was grievously disappointed. His exaggerated estimate of his son's discretion had given place to a no less misplaced despondency, quite inaccessible to Mrs. Ponsonby's consolations as to the spirit that had prompted the performance. He could have better understood

a youth being unable to forego the exhibition of a handsome person and dress, than imagine that any one of moderate sense could either expect the invasion, or use these means of averting it. If imagination was to be allowed for, so much the worse. A certain resemblance to the childish wilfulness with which his wife had trifled with her health, occurred to him, increasing his vexation by gloomy shadows of the past.

His silent mortification and kind anxiety went to his son's heart. Louis was no less disappointed in himself, in finding his own judgment as untrustworthy as ever, since the exploit that had been a perpetual feast to his chivalrous fancy had turned out a mere piece of self-willed imprudence, destroying all the newly-bestowed and highly-valued good opinion of his father; and even in itself, incompetently executed. 'He had made a fool of himself every way.' That had been James's first *dictum*, and he adopted it from conviction.

In the course of the day, good-natured, fat Sir Gilbert Brewster, the colonel of the yeomanry, who had been seriously uneasy at his looks, and had tried to send him home, rode over to inquire for him, complimenting him on being 'thorough game to the last.' Louis relieved his mind by apologies for his blunders, whereupon he learnt that his good colonel had never discovered them, and now only laughed at them, and declared that they were mere trifles to what the whole corps, officers and men, committed whenever they met, and no one cared except one old sergeant who had been in the Light Dragoons. Louis's very repentance for them was another piece of absurdity. He smiled, indeed, but seemed to give himself up as a hopeless subject. His spirits flagged as they had not done throughout his illness, and, unwell, languid, and depressed, he spent his days without an attempt to rally. He was only too conscious of his own inconsistency, but he had not energy enough to resume any of the habits that Mary had so diligently nursed; neglected even his cottage-building, would not trouble himself to consider the carpenter's questions, forgot messages, put off engagements, and seemed to have only just vigour enough to be desultory, tease James, and spoil Clara.

Lord Ormersfield became alarmed, and called in doctors, who recommended sea air; and James suggested a secluded village on the Yorkshire coast, where some friends had been reading in the last long vacation. This was to be the break-up of the party; Mrs. Frost and the two Marys would resort to Dynevor Terrace, Clara would return to school, and James undertook the charge of Louis, who took such exceedingly little heed to the arrangements, that Jem indignantly told him that he cared neither for himself nor anybody else.

CHAPTER XI

A HALTING PROPOSAL

Shallor. Will you, upon good dowry, marry her?

Slender. I will do a greater thing than that, upon your request.
Merry Wives of Windsor

THE first thing that Louis did appear to care for was a letter that arrived about three days previous to their departure, addressed to 'Lord Fitsgosling, Hawmsfield Park, Northwold.' Rather *too* personal, as he observed; he must tell his correspondent that it hurt his feelings. The correspondent was Tom Madison, whose orthography lagged behind his other attainments, if his account might be trusted of 'they lectures on Kemistry.' His penmanship was much improved, and he was prospering, with hopes of promotion and higher wages, when he should have learnt to keep accounts. He liked Mr. Dobbs and the chaplain, and wished to know how to send a crown per post to 'old granfer up at Marksedge; because he is too ignorant to get a horder sinned. Please, my lord, give my duty to him and all inquiring friends, and to Schirlt, up at the Teras.'

Highly amused, Louis lay on the uppermost step from the library window, in the cool summer evening, laughing over the letter. 'There, Aunt Kitty,' he said, 'I commit that tender greeting to your charge,' and as she looked doubtful, 'Yes, do, there's a good aunt and mistress.'

'I am afraid I should not be a good mistress; I ought not to sanction it.'

'Better sanction it above-board than let it go on by stealth,' said Louis. 'You are her natural protector.'

'So much the more reason against it! I ought to wish her to forget this poor boy of yours.'

'Ay, and light Hymen's torch with some thriving tallow-chandler, who would marry a domestic slave as a good speculation, without one spark of the respectful chivalrous love that—'

'Hush! you absurd boy.'

'Well, then, if you won't, I shall go to Jane. The young ladies are all too cold and too prudent, but Jane has a soft spot in her heart, and will not think true love is confined within the rank that keeps a gig. I did think Aunt Kitty had been above vulgar prejudices.'

'Not above being coaxed by you, you gosling, you,' said Aunt Kitty; 'only you must come out of the dew, the sun is quite gone.'

'Presently,' said Louis, as she retreated by the window.

'I would not have been too cold or too prudent!' said Clara.

'I well believe it!'

'You will be one if you are not the other,' said Mary, gathering her work up, with the dread of one used to tropical dews. 'Are not you coming in?'

'When I can persuade myself to write a letter of good advice, a thing I hate.'

'Which,' asked Mary; 'giving or receiving it?'

'Receiving, of course.'—'Giving, of course,' said Clara and Louis at the same instant.

'Take mine, then,' said Mary, 'and come out of the damp.'

'Mary is so tiresome about these things!' cried Clara, as their cousin retreated. 'Such fidgeting nonsense.'

'I once argued it with her,' said Louis, without stirring; 'and she had the right side, that it is often more self-denying to take care of one's health, than to risk it for mere pleasure or heedlessness.'

'There's no dew!' said Clara; 'and if there was, it would not hurt; and if it did, I should be too glad to catch a cold, or something to keep me at home. Oh, if I could only get into a nice precarious state of health!'

'You would soon wish yourself at school, or anywhere else, so that you could feel some life in your limbs,' half sighed Louis.

'I've more than enough! Oh! how my feet ache to run! and my throat feels stifled for want of making a noise; and the hatefulness of always sitting upright, with my shoulders even! Come, you might pity me a little this one night, Louis: I know you do, for Jem is always telling me not to let you set me against it.'

'No, I don't pity you. Pity is next akin to contempt.'

'Nonsense, Louis. Do be in earnest.'

'I have seldom seen the human being whom I could presume to pity: certainly not you, bravely resisting folly and temptation, and with so dear and noble a cause for working.'

'You mean, the hope of helping to maintain grandmamma.'

'Which you will never be able to do, unless you pass through this ordeal, and qualify yourself for skilled labour.'

'I know that,' said Clara; 'but the atmosphere there seems to poison, and take the vigour out of, all they teach. Oh, so different from granny teaching me my notes, or Jem teaching me French—'

'Growling at you—'

'He never growled half as much as I deserved. I cared to learn of him; but I don't care for anything now,—no, not for drawing, which you taught me! There's no heart in it! The whole purpose is to get amazing numbers of marks and pass each other. All dates and words, and gabble gabble!'

'Aye! there's an epitome of the whole world: all ambition, and vanity, and gabble gabble,' said Louis, sadly. 'And what is a gosling, that he should complain?'

'You don't mean that in reality. You are always merry.'

'Some mirth is because one does not always think, Clara; and when one does think deeply enough, there is better cheerfulness.'

'Deeply enough,' said Clara. 'Ah! I see. Knowing that

the world of gabble is not what we belong to, only a preparation ? Is that it ?

‘It is what I meant.’

‘Ah ! but how to make that knowledge help us.’

‘There’s the point. Now and then I think I see ; but then I go off on a wrong tack : I get a silly fit, and a hopeless one, and lose my clue. And yet, after all, there is a highway ; and wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein,’ murmured Louis, as he gazed on the first star of evening.

‘Oh ! tell me how to see my highway at school !’

‘If I only kept my own at home, I might. But you have the advantage—you have a fixed duty, and you always have kept hold of your purposes much better than I.’

‘My purpose !’ said Clara. ‘I suppose that is to learn as fast as I can, that I may get away from that place, and not be a burthen to granny and Jem. Perhaps Jem will marry and be poor, and then I shall send his sons to school and college.’

‘And pray what are your social duties till that time comes ?’

‘That’s plain enough,’ said Clara : ‘to keep my tone from being deteriorated by these girls. Why, Louis, what’s that for ?’ as, with a bow and air of alarm, he hastily moved aside from her.

‘If you are so much afraid of being deteriorated—’

‘Nonsense ! If you only once saw their trumpery cabals, and vanities, and mean equivocations, you would understand that the only thing to be done is to keep clear of them ; take the learning I am sent for, but avoid them !’

‘And where is the golden rule all this time ?’ said Louis, very low.

‘But ought not one to keep out of what is wrong ?’

‘Yes, but not to stand aloof from what is not wrong. Look out, not for what is inferior to yourself, but what is superior. Ah ! you despair ; but, my Giraffe, will you promise me this ? Tell me, next Christmas, a good quality for every bad one you have found in them. You shake your head. Nay, you must, for the credit of your sex. I never found the man in whom there was not something to admire, and I had rather not suppose that women are not better than men. Will you promise ?’

‘I’ll try, but—’

‘But mind, it takes kind offices to bring the blossoms out. There—that’s pretty well, considering our mutual sentiments as to good advice.’

‘Have you been giving me good advice ?’

‘Not bad, I hope.’

‘I thought only people like—like Mary—could give advice.’

‘Ah ! your blindness about Mary invalidates your opinion of your schoolfellows. It shows that you do not deserve a good friend.’

‘I’ve got you ; I want no other.’

‘Quite wrong. Not only is she full of clear, kind, solid sense, like a pillar to lean on, but she could go into detail with you in

your troubles. You have thrown away a great opportunity, and I am afraid I helped you. I shall hold you in some esteem when you are—to conclude sententiously—worthy of her friendship.'

Clara's laugh was loud enough to bring out the Earl, to summon them authoritatively out of the dew. Louis sat apart, writing his letter; Clara, now and then, hovering near, curious to hear how he had corrected Tom's spelling. He had not finished when the ladies bade him good night; and, as he proceeded with it, his father said, 'What is that engrossing correspondence, Louis?'

'Such a sensible letter, that I am quite ashamed of it,' said Louis.

'I wonder at the time you chose for writing, when you are so soon to part with our guests.'

'I have no excuse, if you think it uncivil. I never have spirit to set about anything till the sun is down.'

His father began at once to speak softly: 'No, I intended no blame; I only cannot but wonder to see you so much engrossed with Clara Dynevor.'

'Poor child! she wants some compensation.'

'I have no doubt of your kind intentions; but it would be safer to consider what construction may be placed on attentions so exclusive.'

Louis looked up in blank, incredulous amazement, and then almost laughingly exclaimed, 'Is *that* what you mean? Why, she is an infant, a baby—'

'Not in appearance—'

'You don't know her, father,' said Louis. 'I love her with all my heart, and could not do more. Why, she is, and always has been, my she-younger-brother!'

'I am aware,' said the Earl, without acknowledging this peculiar relationship, 'that this may appear very ridiculous; but experience has shown the need of caution. I should be concerned that your heedless good-nature should be misconstrued, so as to cause pain and disappointment to her, or to lead you to neglect one who has every claim to your esteem and gratitude.'

Louis was bewildered. 'I have been a wretch lately,' he said, 'but I did not know I had been a bear.'

'I did not mean that you could be deficient in ordinary courtesy; but I had hoped for more than mere indifferent civility towards one eminently calculated—' Lord Ormersfield for once failed in his period.

'Are we talking at cross purposes?' exclaimed Fitzjocelyn. 'What have I been doing, or not doing?'

'If my meaning require explanation, it is needless to attempt any.—Is your ankle painful to-night?'

Not a word more, except about his health, could Louis extract, and he went to his room in extreme perplexity.

Again and again did he revolve those words. Quick as were

his perceptions on most points, they were slow where self-consciousness or personal vanity might have sharpened them ; and it was new light to him that he had come to a time of life that could attach meaning to his attentions.

‘Whom had he been neglecting? What had his father been hoping? Who was eminently calculated, and for what?’

It flashed upon him all at once. ‘I see! I see!’ he cried, and burst into a laugh.

Then came consternation, or something very like it. He did not want to feel embarked in manhood. And then his far-away dream of a lady-love had been so transcendently fair, so unequalled in grace, so perfect in accomplishments, so enthusiastic in self-devoted charity, all undefined, floating on his imagination in misty tints of glory! That all this should be suddenly brought down from cloudland, to sink into Mary Ponsonby, with the honest face and downright manner, for whom romance and rapture would be positively ridiculous!

Yet the notion would not be at once dismissed. His declaration that he would do anything to gratify his father had been too sincere for him lightly to turn from his suggestion, especially at a moment when he was full of shame at his own folly, and eagerness to retain the ground he had lost in his father’s opinion ; and, above all, to make him happy. His heart thrilled and glowed as he thought of giving his father real joy, and permanently brightening and enlivening that lonely, solitary life. Besides, who could so well keep the peace between him and his father, and save him by hints and by helpfulness from giving annoyance? He had already learnt to depend on her : she entered into all his interests, and was a most pleasant companion—so wise and good, that the most satisfactory days of his life had been passed under her management, and he had only broken from it to ‘play the fool.’ He was sick of his own volatile Quixotism, and could believe it a relief to be kept in order without trusting to his own judgment. She had every right to his esteem and affection, and the warm feeling he had for her could only be strengthened by closer ties. The unworldliness of the project likewise weighed with him. Had she been a millionaire or a Duke’s daughter, he would not have spent one thought on the matter : but he was touched by seeing how his father’s better feelings had conquered all desire for fortune or connection.

And then Mary could always find everything he wanted!

‘I will do it!’ he determined. ‘Never was son more bound to consider his father. Of course, she will make a much better wife than I deserve. Most likely, my fancies would never have been fulfilled. She will save me from my own foolishness. What ought a man to wish for more than a person sure to make him good? And—well, after all, it cannot be for a long time. They must write to Lima. Perhaps they will wait till her father’s return, or at least till I have taken my degree.’

This last encouraging reflection always wound up the series that perpetually recurred throughout that night of broken sleep ; and when he rose in the morning, he felt as if each waking had added a year to his life, and looked at the glass to see whether he had not grown quite elderly.

'No, indeed ! I am ridiculously youthful, especially since I shaved off my moustache in my rage at the yeomanry mania ! I must systematically burn my cheeks, to look anything near her age !' And he laughed at himself, but ended with a long-drawn sigh.

He was in no state of mind to pause : he was tired of self-debate, and was in haste to render the step irrevocable, and then fit himself to it ; and he betook himself at once to the study, where he astonished his father by his commencement, with crimson cheeks—'I wished to speak to you. Last night I did not catch your meaning at once.'

'We will say no more about it,' was the kind answer. 'If you cannot turn your thoughts in that direction, there is an end of the matter.'

'I think,' said Louis, 'that I could.'

'My dear boy,' said the Earl, with more eagerness than he could quite control, 'you must not imagine that I wish to influence your inclinations unduly ; but I must confess that what I have seen for the last few months, has convinced me that nothing could better secure your happiness.'

'I believe so,' said Louis, gazing from the window.

'Right,' cried the Earl, with more gladness and warmth than his son had ever seen in him ; 'I am delighted that you appreciate such sterling excellence ! Yes, Louis,' and his voice grew thick, 'there is nothing else to trust to.'

'I know it,' said Louis. 'She is very good. She made me very happy when I was ill.'

'You have seen her under the most favourable circumstances. It is the only sort of acquaintance to be relied on. You have consulted your own happiness far more than if you had allowed yourself to be attracted by mere showy gifts.'

'I am sure she will do me a great deal of good,' said Louis, still keeping his eyes fixed on the evergreens.

'You could have done nothing to give me more pleasure !' said the Earl, with heartfelt earnestness. 'I know what she is, and what her mother has been to me. That aunt of hers is a stiff, wrongheaded person ; but she has brought her up well—very well, and her mother has done the rest. As to her father, this is a disadvantage ; but, from what I hear, he is never likely to come home ; and that is not to be weighed against what she is herself. Poor Mary ! how rejoiced she will be, that her daughter at least should no longer be under that man's power ! It is well you have not been extravagant, like some young men, Louis. If you had been running into debt, I should not have been able to gratify your wishes now ; but the

property is so nearly disencumbered, that you can perfectly afford to marry her, with the very fair fortune she must have, unless her father should gamble it away in Peru.'

This was for Lord Ormersfield the incoherency of joy, and Louis was quite carried along by his delight. The breakfast-bell rang, and the Earl rising and drawing his son's arm within his own, pressed it, saying, 'Bless you, Louis!' It was extreme surprise and pleasure to Fitzjocelyn, and yet the next moment he recollected that he stood committed.

How silent he was—how unusually gentle and gracious his father to the whole party! quite affectionate to Mary, and not awful even to Clara. There was far too much meaning in it, and Louis feared Mrs. Ponsonby was seeing through all.

'A morning of Greek would be insupportable,' thought he; and yet he felt as if the fetters of fate were being fast bound around him, when he heard his father inviting James to ride with him.

He wandered and he watched, he spoke absently to Clara, but felt as if robbed of a protector, when she was summoned up-stairs to attend to her packing, and Mary remained alone, writing one of her long letters to Lima.

'Now or never,' thought he, 'before my courage cools. I never saw my father in such spirits!'

He sat down on an ottoman opposite to her, and turned over some newspapers with a restless rustling.

'Can I fetch anything for you?' asked Mary, looking up.

'No, thank you. You are a great deal too good to me, Mary.'

'I am glad,' said Mary, absently, anxious to go on with her letter; but, looking up again at him—'I am sure you want something.'

'No—nothing—but that you should be still more good to me.'

'What is the matter?' said Mary, suspecting that he was beginning to repent of his lazy fit, and wanted her to hear his confession.

'I mean, Mary,' said he, rising, and speaking faster, 'if you—if you would take charge of me altogether. If you would have me, I would do all I could to make you happy; and it would be such joy to my father, and—' (rather like an after-thought) 'to me.'

Her clear, sensible eyes were raised, and her colour deepened; but the confusion was on the gentleman's side—she was too much amazed to feel embarrassment, and there was a pause, till he added, 'I know better than to think myself worthy of you; but you will take me in hand—and, indeed, Mary, there is no one whom I like half so well.'

Poor Louis! was this his romantic and poetical wooing?

'Stop, if you please, Louis!' exclaimed Mary. 'This is so very strange!' And she seemed ready to laugh.

'And—what do you say, Mary?'

'I do not know. I cannot tell what I ought to say,' she returned, rising. 'Will you let me go to mamma?'

She went; and Louis roamed about restlessly, till, on the stairs, he encountered Mrs. Frost, who instantly exclaimed, 'Why, my dear, what is the matter with you?'

'I have been proposing to Mary,' said he, in a very low murmur, his eyes downcast, but raised the next moment, to see the effect, as if it had been a piece of mischief.

'Well—proposing what?'

'Myself;' most innocently whispered.

'You!—you!—Mary!—And—' Aunt Catharine was scarcely able to speak, in the extremity of her astonishment. 'You are not in earnest!'

'She is gone to her mother,' said Louis, hanging over the baluster, so as to look straight down into the hall; and both were silent, till Mrs. Frost exclaimed, 'My dear, dear child, it is an excellent choice! You must be very happy with her!'

'Yes, I found my father was bent on it.'

'That was clear enough,' said his aunt, laughing, but resuming a tone of some perplexity. 'Yet it takes me by surprise: I had not guessed that you were so much attracted.'

'I do like her better than any one. No one is so thoroughly good; no one is likely to make me so good, nor my father so happy.'

There was some misgiving in Mrs. Frost's tone, as she said, 'Dear Louis, you are acting on the best of motives, but—'

'Don't, pray don't, Aunt Kitty,' cried Louis, rearing himself for an instant to look her in the face, but again throwing half his body over the rail, and speaking low. 'I could not meet any one half so good, or whom I know as well. I look up to her, and—yes—I do love her heartily—I would not have done it otherwise. I don't care for beauty and trash, and my father has set his heart on it.'

'Yes, but—' she hesitated. 'My dear, I don't think it safe to marry because one's father has set his heart on it.'

'Indeed,' said Louis, straightening himself, 'I do think I am giving myself the best chance of being made rational and consistent. I never did so well as when I was under her.'

'N—n—no—but—'

'And think how my father will unbend in a homelike home, where all should be made up to him,' he continued, deep emotion swelling his voice.

'My dear boy! And you are sure of your own feeling?'

'Quite sure. Why, I never saw any one,' said he, smiling—'I never cared for any one half so much, except you, Aunt Kitty; no, I didn't. Won't that do?'

'I know I should not have liked your grandpapa—your uncle, I mean—to make such comparisons.'

'Perhaps he had not got an Aunt Kitty,' said Louis. 'No, no! I can't have you so like a novel. No, don't be anxious.'

It can't be for ever so long ; and, of course, the more I am with her, the better I must like her. It will be all right.'

'I don't think you know anything about it,' said Mrs. Frost ; 'but there, that's the last I shall say. You'll forgive your old aunt.'

He smiled, and playfully pressed her hand, adding, 'But we don't know whether she will have me.'

Mary had meantime entered her mother's room, with a look that revealed the whole to Mrs. Ponsonby, who had already been somewhat startled by the demeanour of the father and son at breakfast.

'Oh, mamma, what is to be done ?'

'What do you wish, my child ?' asked her mother, putting her arm round her waist.

'I don't know yet,' said Mary. 'It is so odd !' And the disposition to laugh returned for a moment.

'You were not at all prepared.'

'Oh no ! He seems so young. And,' she added, blushing, 'I cannot tell, but I should not have thought his ways were like the kind of thing.'

'Nor I, and the less since Clara has been here.'

'Oh,' said Mary, without a shade on her calm, sincere brow, 'he has Clara so much with him because he is her only friend.'

The total absence of jealousy convinced Mrs. Ponsonby that the heart could hardly have been deeply touched ; but Mary continued, in a slightly trembling voice, 'I do not see why he should have done this, unless—'

'Unless that his father wished it.'

'Oh,' said Mary, somewhat disappointed, 'but how could Lord Ormersfield possibly—'

'He has an exceeding dread of Louis's making as great a mistake as he did,' said Mrs. Ponsonby ; 'and perhaps he thinks you the best security.'

'And you think Louis only meant to please him ?'

'My dear, I am afraid it may be so. Louis is very fond of him, and easily led by a strong character.'

She pressed her daughter closer, and felt rather than heard a little sigh ; but all that Mary said was, 'Then I had better not think about it.'

'Nay, my dear, tell me first what you think of his manner.'

'It was strange, and a little *debonnaire*, I think,' said Mary, smiling, but tears gathering in her eyes. 'He said I was too good for him. He said he would make me happy, and that he and his father would be very happy.' A great tear fell. 'Something about not being worthy.' Mary shed a few more tears, while her mother silently caressed her ; and, recovering her composure, she firmly said, 'Yes, mamma, I see it is not the real thing. It will be kinder to him to tell him to put it out of his head.'

'And you, my dear ?'

'Oh, mamma, you know you could not spare me.'

'If this were the *real thing*, dearest—'

'No,' whispered Mary; 'I could not leave you alone with papa.'

Mrs. Ponsonby went on as if she had not heard: 'As it is, I own I am relieved that you should not wish to accept him. I cannot be sure it would be for your happiness.'

'I do not think it would be right,' said Mary, as if that were her strength.

'He is a dear, noble fellow, and has the highest, purest principles and feelings. I can't but love him almost as if he were my own child: I never saw so much sweetness and prettiness about any one, except his mother; and, oh! how far superior he is to her! But, then, he is boyish, he is weak—I am afraid he is changeable.'

'Not in his affections,' said Mary, reproachfully.

'No; but in purposes. An impulse leads him he does not know where; and now, I think, he is acting on excellent motives, without knowing what he is doing. There's no security that he might not meet the person who—'

'Oh, mamma!'

'He would strive against temptation, but we have no right to expose him to it. To accept him now, it seems to me, would be taking too much advantage of his having been left so long to our mercy; and it might be, that he would become restless and discontented, find out that he had not chosen for himself—regret—and have his tone of mind lowered—'

'Oh, stop, mamma; I would not let it be, on any account.'

'No, my dear, I could not part with you where we were not sure the '*real thing*' was felt for you. If he had been strongly bent on it, he would have conducted matters differently; but he knows no better.'

'You and I don't part,' said Mary.

Neither spoke till she renewed her first question, 'What is to be done?'

'Shall I go and speak to him, my dear?'

'Perhaps I had better, if you will come with me.' Then, hesitating—'I will go to my room for a moment, and then I shall be able to do it more steadily.'

Mrs. Ponsonby's thoughts were anxious during the five minutes of Mary's absence; but she returned composed, according to her promise, whatever might be the throbbings beneath. As Mrs. Ponsonby opened the door, she saw Louis and his aunt together, and was almost amused at their conscious start, the youthful speed with which the one darted into the further end of the corridor, and the undignified haste with which the other hopped down-stairs.

By the time they reached the drawing-room, he had recovered himself so as to come forward in a very suitable, simple manner; and Mary said, at once, 'Louis, thank you; but we think it would be better not—'

'Not!' exclaimed Fitzjocelyn.

'Not,' repeated Mary; 'I do not think there is that between us which would make it right.'

'There would be!' cried Louis, gaining ardour by the difficulty, 'if you would only try. Mrs. Ponsonby, tell her we would make her happy.'

'You would try,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, kindly; 'but I think she is right. Indeed, Louis, you must forgive me for saying that you are hardly old enough to make up your mind—'

'Madison is younger,' said Louis, boyishly enough to make her smile, but earnestly proceeding, 'Won't you try me? Will you not say that if I can be steady and persevering—'

'No,' said Mrs. Ponsonby; 'it would not be fair towards either of you to make any conditions.'

'But if without them, I should do better—Mary, will you say nothing?'

'We had better not think of it,' said Mary, her eyes on the ground.

'Why? is it that I am too foolish, too unworthy?'

She made a great effort. 'Not that, Louis. Do not ask any more; it is better not; you have done as your father wished—now let us be as we were before.'

'My father will be very much disappointed,' said Louis, with chagrin.

'I will take care of your father,' said Mrs. Ponsonby; and as Mary took the moment for escaping, she proceeded to say some affectionate words of her own tender feeling towards Louis; to which he only replied by saying, sadly, and with some mortification, 'Never mind; I know it is quite right. I am not worthy of her.'

'That is not the point; but I do not think you understand your own feelings, or how far you were actuated by the wish to gratify your father.'

'I assure you,' cried Louis, 'you do not guess how I look up to Mary; her unfailing kindness, her entering into all my nonsense—her firm, sound judgment, that would keep me right—and all she did for me when I was laid up. Oh! why cannot you believe how dear she is to me?'

'*How dear* is just what I do believe; but still this is not enough.'

'Just what Aunt Kitty says,' said Louis, perplexed, yet amused at his own perplexity.

'You will know better by and by,' she answered, smiling: 'in the meantime, believe that you are our very dear cousin, as ever.' And she shook hands with him, detecting in his answering smile a little relief, although a great deal of disappointment.

Mary had taken refuge in her room, where a great shower of tears would have their course, though she scolded herself all the time. 'Have done! have done! It is best as it is. He does

not really wish it, and I could not leave mamma. We will never think of it again, and we will be as happy as we were before.'

Her mother, meanwhile, was waiting below-stairs, thinking that she should spare Louis something, by taking the initiative in speaking to his father; and she was sorry to see the alacrity with which the Earl came up to her, with a congratulatory 'Well, Mary!' She could hardly make him comprehend the real state of the case; and then his resignation was far more trying than that of the party chiefly concerned. Her praise of Fitzjocelyn had little power to comfort. 'I see how it is,' he said, calmly: 'do not try to explain it away; I acquiesce—I have no doubt you acted wisely for your daughter.'

'Nothing would have delighted me more, if he were but a few years older.'

'You need not tell me the poor boy's failings,' said his father, sadly.

'It is on account of no failing; but would it not be a great mistake to risk their happiness to fulfil our own scheme?'

'I hoped to secure their happiness.'

'Aye, but is there not something too capricious to find happiness without its own free will and choice? Did you never hear of the heart?'

'Oh! if she be attached elsewhere'—and he seemed so much relieved, that Mrs. Ponsonby was sorry to be obliged to contradict him in haste, and explain that she did not believe Fitzjocelyn's heart to be yet developed; whereupon he was again greatly vexed. 'So he has offered himself without attachment. I beg your pardon, Mary; I am sorry your daughter should have been so treated.'

'Do not misunderstand me. He is strangely youthful and simple, bent on pleasing you, and fancying his warm, brotherly feeling to be what you desire.'

'It would be the safest foundation.'

'Yes, if he were ten years older, and had seen the world; but in these things he is like a child, and it would be dangerous to influence him. Do not take it to heart; you ought to be contented, for I saw nothing so plainly as that he loves nobody half so well as you. Only be patient with him.'

'You are the same Mary as ever,' he said, softened; and she left him, hoping that she had secured a favourable audience for his son, who soon appeared at the window, somewhat like a culprit.

'I could not help it!' he said.

'No; but you may set a noble aim before you—you may render yourself worthy of her esteem and confidence, and in so doing you will fulfil my fondest hopes.'

'I asked her to try me, but they would make no conditions. I am sorry this could not be, since you wished it.'

'If you are not sorry on your own account, there are no regrets to be wasted on mine.'

‘Candidly, father,’ said Louis, ‘much as I like her, I cannot be sorry to keep my youth and liberty a little longer.’

‘Then you should never have entered on the subject at all,’ said Lord Ormersfield, beginning to write a letter; and poor Louis, in his praiseworthy effort not to be reserved with him, found he had been confessing that he had not only been again making a fool of himself, but, what was less frequent and less pardonable, of his father likewise. He limped out at the window, and was presently found by his great-aunt, reading what he called a raving novel, to see how he ought to have done it. She shook her head at him, and told him that he was not even decently concerned.

‘Indeed I am,’ he replied. ‘I wished my father to have had some peace of mind about me, and it does not flatter one’s vanity.’

Dear, soft-hearted Aunt Kitty, with all her stores of comfort ready prepared, and unable to forgive, or even credit, the rejection of her Louis, without a prior attachment, gave a hint that this might be his consolation. He caught eagerly at the idea. ‘I had never once thought of that! It can’t be any Spaniard out in Peru—she has too much sense. What are you looking so funny about? What! is it nearer home? That’s it, then! Famous! It would be a capital arrangement, if that terrible old father is conformable. What an escape I have had of him! I am sure it is a most natural and proper preference—’

‘Stop! stop, Louis; you are going too fast. I know nothing. Don’t say a word to Jem, on any account: indeed, you must not. It is all going on very well now; but the least notion that he was observed, or that it was his Uncle Oliver’s particular wish, and there would be an end of it.’

She was just wise enough to keep back the wishes of the other vizier; but she had said enough to set Louis quite at his ease, and put him in the highest spirits. He seemed to have taken out a new lease of boyishness, and, though constrained before Mary, laughed, talked, and played pranks, so as unconsciously to fret his father exceedingly.

Clara’s alert wits perceived that so many private interviews had some signification; and Mrs. Frost found her talking it over with her brother, and conjecturing so much, that granny thought it best to supply the key, thinking, perhaps, that a little jealousy would do Jem no harm. But the effect on him was to produce a fit of hearty laughter, as he remembered poor Lord Ormersfield’s unaccountable urbanity and suppressed exultation in the morning’s ride. ‘I honour the Ponsonbys,’ he said, ‘for not choosing to second his lordship’s endeavours to tyrannize over that poor fellow, body and soul. Poor Louis! he is fabulously dutiful.’

But Clara, recovering from her first stupor of wonder, began scolding him for presuming to laugh at anything so cruel to Louis. It was not the part of a friend! And with tears of indignation and sympathy starting from her eyes, she was pathe-

tically certain that, though granny and Jem were so unfeeling as to laugh, his high spirits were only assumed to hide his suffering. 'Poor Louis! what had he not said to her about Mary last night! Now she knew what he meant! And as to Mary, she was glad she had never liked her; she had no patience with her: of course, she was far too prosy and stupid to care for anything like Louis; it was a great escape for him. It would serve her right to marry a horrid little crooked clerk in her father's office: and poor dear, dear Louis must get over it, and have the most beautiful wife in the world. Don't you remember, Jem, the lady with the splendid dark eyes on the platform at Euston Square, when you so nearly made us miss the train, with the brow that you said—'

'Hush, Clara; don't talk nonsense.'

CHAPTER XII

CHILDE ROLAND

A house there is, and that's enough,
From whence one fatal morning issues
A brace of warriors, not in buff,
But rustling in their silks and tissues.
The heroines undertook the task;
Thro' lanes unknown, o'er stiles they ventured,—
Rapped at the door, nor stayed to ask,
But bounce into the parlour entered.—GRAY'S *Long Story*

'No carmine? Nor scarlet lake in powder?'

'Could procure some, my lord.'

'Thank you, the actinia would not live. I must take what I can find. A lump of gamboge—'

'If you stay much longer, he will not retain his senses,' muttered James Frost, who was leaning backwards against the counter, where the bewildered bookseller of the little coast-town of Bickleypool was bustling, in the vain endeavour to understand and fulfil the demands of that perplexing customer, Lord Fitzjocelyn.

'Some drawing-paper. This is hardly absorbent enough. If you have any block sketch-books?—'

'Could procure some, my lord.'

James looked at his watch, while the man dived into his innermost recesses. 'The tide!' he said.

'Never mind; we shall only stick in the mud.'

'How could you expect to find anything here? A half-crown paint-box is their wildest dream.'

'Keep quiet, Jem; go and look out some of those library books, like a wise man.'

'A wise man would be at a loss here,' said James, casting his eye along the battered purple backs of the circulating-library books.

'Wisdom won't condescend! Ah; thank you; this will do nicely. Those colours—yes; and the *Sea-side Book*. I'll choose one or two. What is most popular here?'

James began to whistle; but Louis, taking up a volume, became engrossed beyond the power of hints, and hardly stepped aside to make way for some ladies who entered the shop. A peremptory touch of the arm at length roused him, and holding up the book to the shopman, he put it into his pocket, seized his ash stick, put his arm into his cousin's, and hastened into the street.

'Did you ever see—' began Jem.

'Most striking. I did not know you had met with her. What an idea—the false self conjuring up phantoms—'

'What are you talking of? Did you not see her?'

'Elizabeth Barrett. Was she there?'

'Is that her name? Do you know her?'

'I had heard of her, but never—'

'How?—where? Who is she?'

'I only saw her name in the title-page.'

'What's all this? You did not see her?'

'Who? Did not some ladies come into the shop?'

'Some ladies! Is it possible! Why, I touched you to make you look.'

'I thought it was your frenzy about the tide. What now?—'

James made a gesture of despair. 'The loveliest creature I ever saw. You may see her yet, as she comes out. Come back!'

'Don't be so absurd,' said Fitzjocelyn, laughing, and with instinctive dislike of staring, resisting his cousin's effort to wheel him round. 'What, you will?' withdrawing his arm. 'I shall put off without you, if you don't take care.'

And, laughing, he watched Jem hurry up the sloping street and turn the corner, then turned to pursue his own way, his steps much less lame and his looks far more healthful than they had been a month before. He reached the quay—narrow, slippery, and fishy, but not without beauty, as the green water lapped against the hewn stones, and rocked the little boats moored in the wide bay, sheltered by a richly-wooded promontory. 'Jem in a fit of romance! Well, whose fault will it be if we miss the tide? I'll sit in the boat, and read that poem again.—Oh! here he comes, out of breath. Well, Jem, did the heroine drop glove or handkerchief? Or, on a second view, was she minus an eye?'

'You were,' said James, hurrying breathlessly to unmoor the boat.

'Let me row,' said Louis; 'your breath and senses are both lost in the fair vision.'

'It is of no use to talk to you—'

'I shall ask no questions till we are out of the harbour, or you will be running foul of one of those colliers—a tribute with which the Fair Unknown may dispense.'

The numerous black colliers and lighters showed that precautions were needful till they had pushed out far enough to make the little fishy town look graceful and romantic; and the tide was ebbing so fast, that Louis deemed it prudent to spend his strength on rowing rather than on talking.

James first broke silence by exclaiming—‘Do you know where Beauchastel is?’

‘On the other side of the promontory. Don’t you remember the spire rising among the trees, as we see it from the water?’

‘That church must be worth seeing. I declare I’ll go there next Sunday.’

Another silence, and Louis said—‘I am curious to know whether you saw her.’

‘She was getting into the carriage as I turned the corner; so I went back and asked Bull who they were.’

‘I hope she was the greengrocer’s third cousin.’

‘Pshaw! I tell you it was Mrs. Mansell and her visitors.’

‘Oho! No wonder Beauchastel architecture is so grand. What an impudent fellow you are, Jem!’

‘The odd thing is,’ said James, a little ashamed of Louis having put Mansell and Beauchastel together, as he had not intended, ‘that it seems they asked Bull who we were. I thought one old lady was staring hard at you, as if she meant to claim acquaintance; but you shot out of the shop like a sky-rocket.’

‘Luckily there’s no danger of that. No one will come to molest us here.’

‘Depend on it, they are meditating a descent on his lordship.’

‘You shall appear in my name, then.’

‘Too like a bad novel: besides, you don’t look respectable enough for my tutor. And, now I think of it, no doubt she was asking Bull how he came to let such a disreputable old shooting-jacket into his shop.’

The young men worked up an absurd romance between them, as merrily they crossed the estuary, and rowed up a narrow creek, with a whitewashed village on one side, and on the other a solitary house, the garden sloping to the water, and very nautical—the vane, a union-jack waved by a brilliant little sailor on the top of a mast, and the harbour, half a boat set on end; whence, as James steered up to the stone steps that were one by one appearing, there emerged an old, grizzly, weather-beaten sailor, who took his pipe from his mouth, and caught hold of the boat.

‘Thank you, Captain!’ cried Fitzjocelyn. ‘I’ve brought home the boat safe, you see, by my own superhuman exertions—no thanks to Mr. Frost, there!’

‘That’s his way, Captain,’ retorted Jem, leaping out, and helping his cousin: ‘you may thank me for getting him home at all! But for me, he would have his back against the counter, and his head in a book, this very moment.’

'Ask him what *he* was after,' returned Louis.

'Which of us d'ye think most likely to lag, Captain Hannaford?' cried Jem, preventing the question. 'Which would you choose to have on board?'

'Ye'd both of ye make more mischief than work,' said the old seaman, who had been looking from one to the other of the young men, as if they were performing a comedy for his special diversion.

'So you would not enter us on board the *Eliza Priscilla*?' cried Louis.

'No, no,' said the old man, shrewdly, and with an air of holding something back; whereupon they both pressed him, and obtained for answer, 'No, no; I wouldn't sail with you'—signing towards Fitzjocelyn—'in my crew; you'd be more trouble than ye're worth. And as to you, sir, if I wouldn't sail *with* ye, I'd like still less to sail *under* you.'

He finished with a droll, deprecating glance, and Louis laughed heartily; but James was silent, and as soon as they had entered the little parlour, declared that it would not do to encourage that old skipper—he was waylaying them like the Ancient Mariner, and was actually growing impudent.

'An old man's opinion of two youngsters is not what *I* call impudence,' began Louis, with an emphasis that made Jem divert his attack.

Those two cousins had never spent a happier month than in these small lodgings, built by the old retired merchant-seaman evidently on the model of that pride of his heart, the *Eliza Priscilla*, his little coasting trader, now the charge of his only surviving son; for this was a family where drowning was like a natural death, and old Captain Hannaford looked on the probability of sleeping in Ebbscreek churchyard, much as Bayard did at the prospect of dying in his bed. His old deaf wife kept the little cabin-like rooms most exquisitely neat; and the twelve-years-old Priscilla, the orphan of one of the lost sons, waited on the gentlemen with an old-fashioned, womanly deportment and staid countenance that, in the absence of all other grounds of distress, Louis declared was quite a pain to him.

The novelty of the place, the absence of restraint, the easy life, and, above all, the freshness of returning health, rendered his spirits exceedingly high, and he had never been more light-hearted and full of mirth. James, elated at his rapid improvement, was scarcely less full of liveliness and frolic, enjoying to the utmost the holiday, which perhaps both secretly felt might be the farewell to the perfect carelessness of boyish relaxation. Bathing, boating, fishing, dabbling, were the order of the day, and withal just enough quarrelling and teasing to add a little spice to their pleasures. Louis was over head and ears in maritime natural history; but Jem, backed by Mrs. Hannaford, prohibited his 'messes' from making a permanent

settlement in the parlour ; though festoons of sea-weed trellised the porch, ammonites heaped the grass-plat, tubs of sea-water flanked the approach to the front door ; and more than one bowl, with inmates of a suspicious nature, was often deposited even on the parlour table.

On the afternoon following the expedition to Bickleypool, Louis was seated, with an earthenware pan before him, coaxing an actinia with raw beef to expand her blossom, to be copied for Miss Faithfull. Another bowl stood near, containing some feathery serpulæ ; and the weeds were heaped on the locker of the window behind him, and on the back of the chair which supported his lame foot. The third and only remaining chair accommodated James, with a book placed on the table ; and a semicircle swept round it, within which nothing marine might extend.

Louis was by turns drawing, enticing his refractory sitter, exhorting her to bloom, and complimenting her delicate beauty, until James, with a groan, exclaimed—‘Is silence impossible to you, Fitzjocelyn ? I would go into the garden, but that I should be beset by the intolerable old skipper.’

‘I beg your pardon—I thought you never heard nor heeded me.’

‘I don’t in general, but this requires attention ; and it is past all bearing to hear how you go on to that jelly.’

‘Read aloud, then : it will answer two purposes.’

‘This is Divinity—Hooker,’ said James, sighing wearily.

‘So much the better. I read some once ; I wish I had been obliged to go on.’

‘You are the oddest fellow !—After all, I believe you have a craving after my profession.’

‘Is that a discovery ?’ said Louis, washing the colour out of his brush. ‘The only person I envy is a country curate—except a town one.’

‘Don’t talk like affectation !’ growled James.

‘Do you know, Jem,’ said Louis, leaning back, and drawing the brush between his lips, ‘I am persuaded that something will turn up to prevent it from being your profession.’

‘Your persuasions are wrong, then !’

‘That fabulous uncle in the Indies—’

‘You know I am determined to accept nothing from my uncle, were he to lay it at my feet—which he never will.’

‘Literally or metaphorically ?’ asked Louis, softly.

‘Pshaw !’

‘You Dynevors don’t resemble my sea-pink. See how she stretches her elegant fringes for this very unpleasant bit of meat ? There ! I won’t torment you any more ; read, and stop my mouth !’

‘You are in earnest ?’

‘You seem to think that if a man cannot be a clergyman, he is not to be a Christian.’

'Then don't break in with your actinias and stuff!'

'Certainly not,' said Louis, gravely.

The first interruption came from James himself. Leaping to his feet with a sudden bound, he exclaimed, 'There they are!' and stood transfixed in a gaze of ecstasy.

'You have made me smudge my lake,' said Louis, in the mild tone of 'Diamond, Diamond!'

'I tell you, there they are!' cried James, rushing into wild activity.

'One would think it the Fair Unknown,' said Louis, not troubling himself to look round, nor desisting from washing out his smudge.

'It is! it is!—it is all of them! Here they come, I tell you, and the place is a very merman's cave!'

'Take care—the serpula—don't!' as James hurriedly opened the door leading to the stairs—disposed of the raw meat on one step and the serpulæ on another, and hurled after them the heap of sea-weed, all but one trailing festoon of 'Luckie Minnie's lines,' which, while his back was turned, Louis by one dexterous motion wreathed round the crown of his straw hat; otherwise never stirring, but washing quietly on, until he rose as little Priscilla opened the door, and stood aside, mutely overawed at the stream of flounced ladies that flowed past, and seemed to fill up the entire room. It was almost a surprise to find that, after all, there were only three of them!

'I knew I was not mistaken,' said a very engaging, affectionate voice. 'It is quite shocking to have to introduce myself to you—Lady Conway—'

'My aunt!' cried Louis, with eager delight—'and my cousin!' he added, turning with a slight blush towards the maiden, whom he felt, rather than saw, to be the worthy object of yesterday's rapture.

'Not quite,' she answered, not avoiding the grasp of his hand, but returning it with calm, distant politeness.

'Not quite,' repeated Lady Conway. 'Your real cousins are no farther off than Beauchastel—'

'Where you must come and see them,' added the third lady—a portly, cordial, good-natured dame, whom Lady Conway introduced as Mrs. Mansell, who had known his mother well; and Louis making a kind of presentation of his cousin James, the two elder ladies were located on two of the chairs: the younger one, as if trying to be out of the way, placed herself on the locker. Jem stood leaning on the back of the other chair; and Louis stood over his aunt, in an ecstasy at the meeting—at the kind, warm manner and pleasant face of his aunt—and above all, at the indescribable pleasure imparted by the mere presence of the beautiful girl, though he hardly dared even to look at her; and she was the only person whose voice was silent in the chorus of congratulation, on the wonderful chance that had brought the aunt and nephew together. The

one had been a fortnight at Beauchastel, the other a month at Ebbscreek, without guessing at each other's neighbourhood, until Lady Conway's attention had been attracted at the library by Louis's remarkable resemblance to her sister, and making inquiries, she had learnt that he was no other than Lord Fitzjocelyn. She was enchanted with the likeness, declaring that all she wished was to see him look less delicate, and adding her entreaties to those of Mrs. Mansell, that the two young men would come at once to Beauchastel.

Louis looked with wistful doubt at James, who, he knew, could not brook going to fine places in the character of tutor; but, to his surprise and pleasure, James was willing and eager, and made no demur, except that Fitzjocelyn could not walk so far, and the boat was gone out. Mrs. Mansell then proposed the ensuing Monday, when, she said, she and Mr. Mansell should be delighted to have them to meet a party of shooting gentlemen—of course they were sportsmen. Louis answered at once for James; but for himself, he could not walk, nor even ride the offered shooting-pony; and thereupon ensued more minute questions whether his ankle were still painful.

'Not more than so as to be a useful barometer. I have been testing it by the sea-weeds. If I am good for nothing else, I shall be a walking weather-glass, as well as a standing warning against man-traps.'

'You don't mean that you fell into a man-trap!' exclaimed Mrs. Mansell, in horror. 'That will be a warning for Mr. Mansell! I have such a dread of the frightful things!'

'A trap ingeniously set by myself,' said Louis. 'I was only too glad no poor poacher fell into it.'

'Your father told me that it was a fall down a steep bank,' exclaimed Lady Conway.

'Exactly so; but I suppose he thought it for my credit to conceal that my trap consisted of a flight of stone steps, very solid and permanent, with the trifling exception of cement.'

'If the truth were known,' said James, 'I believe that a certain scamp of a boy was at the bottom of those steps.'

'I'm the last person to deny it,' said Louis, quietly, though not without rising colour; 'there was a scamp of a boy at the bottom of the steps, and very unpleasant he found it—though not without the best consequences, and among them the present—' And he turned to Lady Conway with a pretty mixture of gracefulness and affection, enough to win the heart of any aunt.

Mrs. Mansell presently fell into raptures at the sight of the drawing materials, which must, she was sure, delight Isabel; but she was rather discomfited by the sight of the 'subject,'—called it an odious creature, then good-humouredly laughed at herself, but would not sit down again, evidently wishing to escape from close quarters with such monsters. Lady Conway likewise rose, and looked into the basin, exclaiming, in her turn, 'Ah! I see you understand these things! Yes, they are

very interesting! Virginia will be delighted; she has been begging me for an aquarium wherever we go. You must tell her how to manage it. Look, Isabel; would not she be in ecstasies?’

Miss Conway looked, but did not seem to partake in the admiration. ‘I am perverse enough never to like what is the fashion,’ she said.

‘I tried to disgust Fitzjocelyn with his pets on that very ground,’ said James; ‘but their charms were too strong for him.’

‘Fashion is the very testimony to them,’ said Louis. ‘I think I could convince you.’

He would perhaps have produced his lovely *serpula* blossoms; but he was forced to pass on to his aunt and Mrs. Mansell, who had found something safer for their admiration, in the shape of a great *Cornu ammonis* in the garden.

‘He can throw himself into any pursuit,’ said James, as he paused at the door with Miss Conway; but suddenly becoming aware of the slimy entanglement round his hat, he exclaimed, ‘Absurd fellow!’ and pulled it off rather petulantly, adding, with a little constraint, ‘Recovery does put people into mad spirits! I fancy the honest folks here look on in amaze.’

Miss Conway gave a very pretty smile of sympathy and consolation, that shone like a sunbeam on her beautiful pensive features and dark, soft eyes. Then she began to admire the view, as they stood on the turf, beside Captain Hannaford’s two small cannon, overlooking the water towards Bickleypool, with a purple hill rising behind it. A yacht was sailing into the harbour, and James ran indoors to fetch a spy-glass, while Lady Conway seized the occasion of asking her nephew his tutor’s name.

Louis, who had fancied she must necessarily understand all his kindred, was glad to guard against shocks to Jem’s sensitive pride, and eagerly explained the disproportion between his birth and fortune, and his gallant efforts to relieve his grandmother from her burthens. He was pleased to find that he had touched all his auditors, and to hear kind-hearted Mrs. Mansell repeat her special invitation to Mr. Frost Dynevor with double cordiality.

‘If you must play practical jokes,’ said James, as they watched the carriage drive off, ‘I wish you would choose better moments for them.’

‘I thought you would be more in character as a merman brave,’ said Louis.

‘I wonder what character you thought you appeared in!’

‘I never meant you to discover it while they were here, nor would you, if you were not so careful of your complexion. Come, throw it at my head now, as you would have done naturally, and we shall have fair weather again!’

‘I am only concerned at the impression you have made.’

‘Too late now, is it? You don’t mean to be bad company for

the rest of the day. It is too bad, after such a presence as has been here. She is a poem in herself. It is like a vision to see her move in that calm, gliding way. Such eyes, so deep, so tranquil, revealing the sphere apart where she dwells! An ideal! How can you be savage after sitting in the same room, and hearing that sweet, low voice?’

Meantime the young lady sat back in the carriage, dreamily hearing, and sometimes answering, the conversation of her two elders, as they returned through pretty forest-drives into the park of Beauchastel, and up to the handsome, well-kept house; where, after a few words from Mrs. Mansell, she ascended the stairs.

‘Isabel!’ cried a bright voice, and a girl of fourteen came skating along the polished oak corridor. ‘Come and have some tea in the schoolroom, and tell us your adventures!’ And so saying, she dragged the dignified Isabel into an old-fashioned sitting-room, where a little pale child, two years younger, sprang up, and, with a cry of joy, clung round the elder sister.

‘My white bind-weed,’ said Isabel, fondly caressing her, ‘have you been out on the pony?’

‘Oh! yes; we wanted only you. Sit down there.’ And as Isabel obeyed, the little Louisa placed herself on her lap, with one arm round her neck, and looked with proud glee at the kind, sensible-faced governess who was pouring out the tea.

‘The reconnoitring party!’ eagerly cried Virginia. ‘Did you find the cousin?’

‘Yes, we did.’

‘Oh! Then what is he like?’

‘You will see when he comes on Monday.’

‘Coming—oh! And is he so very handsome?’

‘I can see how pretty a woman your Aunt Louisa must have been.’

‘News!’ laughed Virginia; ‘when mamma is always preaching to me to be like her!’

‘Is he good-natured?’ asked Louisa.

‘I had not full means of judging,’ said Isabel, more thoughtfully than seemed justified by the childish question. ‘His cousin is coming, too,’ she added; ‘Mr. Frost Dynevor.’

‘Another cousin!’ exclaimed Virginia.

‘No; a relation of Lord Ormersfield—a person to be much respected. He is heir to a lost estate, and of a very grand old family. Lord Fitzjocelyn says that he is exerting himself to the very utmost for his grandmother and orphan sister; denying himself everything. He is to be a clergyman. There was a book of divinity open on the table.’

‘He must be very good!’ said Louisa, in a low, impressed voice, and fondling her sister’s hand. ‘Will he be as good as Sir Roland?’

‘Oh! I am glad he is coming!’ cried Virginia. ‘We have so wished to see somebody very good!’

A bell rang—a signal that Lady Conway would be in her room, where she liked her two girls to come to her while she was dressing. Louisa reluctantly detached herself from her sister, and Virginia lingered to say, ‘Dress quickly, please, please, Isabel. I know there is a new bit of Sir Roland done! Oh! I hope Mr. Dynevor is like him!’

‘Not quite,’ said Isabel, smiling as they ran away. ‘Poor children, I am afraid they will be disappointed; but long may their craving be to see “somebody very good!”’

‘I am very glad they should meet any one answering the description,’ said the governess. ‘I don’t gather that you are much delighted with the object of the expedition.’

‘A pretty boy—very pretty. It quite explains all I have ever heard of his mother.’

‘As you told the children.’

‘More than I told the children. Their aunt never by description seemed to me my ideal, as you know. I would rather have seen a likeness to Lord Ormersfield, who—though I don’t like him—has something striking in the curt, dry, melancholy dignity of his manner.’

‘And how has Lord Fitzjocelyn displeased you?’

‘Perhaps there is no harm in him—he may not have character enough for that; but talk, attitudes, everything betrays that he is used to be worshipped—takes it as a matter of course, and believes nothing so interesting as himself.’

‘Don’t you think you may have gone with your mind made up?’

‘If you mean that I thought myself uncalled for, and heartily detested the expedition, you are right; but I saw what I did not expect.’

‘Was it very bad?’

‘A very idle practical joke, such as I dislike particularly. A quantity of wet sea-weed wound round Mr. Dynevor’s hat.’

Miss King laughed. ‘Really, my dear, I don’t think you know what young men like from each other.’

‘Mr. Dynevor did *not* like it,’ said Isabel, ‘though he tried to pass it off lightly as the spirits of recovery. Those spirits—I am afraid he has too much to suffer from them. There is something so ungenerous in practical wit, especially from a prosperous man to one unprosperous!’

‘Well, Isabel, I won’t contradict, but I should imagine that such things often showed people to be on the best of terms.’

Isabel shook her head, and left the room, to have her dark hair braided, with little heed from herself, as she sat dreamily over a book. Before the last bracelet was clasped, she was claimed by her two little sisters, who gave her no peace till her desk was opened, and a manuscript drawn forth, that they might hear the two new pages of her morning’s work. It was a Fouqué-like tale, relieving and giving expression to the yearnings for holiness and loftiness that had grown up within Isabel Conway in the cramped round of her existence. The story went back to

the troubadour days of Provence, where a knight, the heir of a line of shattered fortunes, was betrothed to the heiress of the oppressors, that thus all wrongs might be redressed. They had learnt to love, when Sir Roland discovered that the lands in dispute had been won by sacrilege. He met Adeline at a chapel in a little valley, to tell the whole. They agreed to sacrifice themselves, that restitution should be made; the knight to go as a crusader to the Holy Land; the lady, after waiting awhile to tend her aged father, to enter a convent, and restore her dower to the church. Twice had Isabel written that parting, pouring out her heart in the high-souled tender devotion of Roland and his Adeline; and both feeling and description were beautiful and poetical, though unequal. Louisa used to cry whenever she heard it, yet only wished to hear it again and again; and when Virginia insisted on reading it to Miss King, tears had actually been surprised in the governess's eyes. Yet she liked still better Adeline's meek and patient temper, where breathed the feeling Isabel herself would fain cherish—the deep, earnest, spiritual life and high consecrated purpose that were with the Provençal maiden through all her enforced round of gay festivals, light minstrelsy, tourneys, and Courts of Love. Thus far had the story gone. Isabel had been writing a wild, mysterious ballad, reverting to that higher love and the true spirit of self-sacrifice, which was to thrill strangely on the ears of the thoughtless at a contention for the Golden Violet, and which she had adapted to a favourite air, to the extreme delight of the two girls. To them the *Chapel in the valley*, Roland and his Adeline, were very nearly real, and were the hidden joy of their hearts,—all the more because their existence was a precious secret between the three sisters and Miss King, who viewed it as such an influence on the young ones, that, with more meaning than she could have explained, she called it their *Télémaque*. The following-up of the teaching of Isabel and Miss King might lead to results as little suspected by Lady Conway as Fénélon's philosophy was by Louis XIV.

Lady Conway was several years older than her beautiful sister, and had married much later. Perhaps she had aimed too high, and had met with disappointments unavowed; for she had finally contented herself with becoming the second wife of Sir Walter Conway, and was now his serene, good-natured, prosperous widow. Disliking his estate and neighbourhood, and thinking the daughters wanted London society and London masters, she shut up the house until her son should be of age, and spent the season in Lowndes-square, the autumn either abroad, in visits, or at watering-places.

Beauchastel was an annual resort of the family. Isabel was more slenderly portioned than her half-sisters; and she was one of the nearest surviving relations of her mother's cousin, Mr. Mansell, whose large comfortable house was always hospitable; and whose wife, a great dealer in good-natured confidential

gossip, used to throw out hints to her great friend, Lady Conway, that much depended on Isabel's marriage—that Mr. Mansell had been annoyed at connections formed by others of his relations—but though he had decided on nothing, the dear girl's choice might make a great difference.

Nothing could be more passive than Miss Conway. She could not remember her mother, but her childhood had been passed under an admirable governess; and though her own Miss Longman had left her, Miss King, the successor, was a person worthy of her chief confidence. At two-and-twenty, the schoolroom was still the home of her affections, and her ardent love was lavished on her little sisters and her brother Walter.

Going out with Lady Conway was mere matter of duty and submission. She had not such high animal spirits as to find enjoyment in her gaieties, and her grave, pensive character only attained to walking through her part; she had seen little but the more frivolous samples of society, scorned and disliked all that was worldly and manœuvring, and hung back from levity and coquetry with utter distaste. Removed from her natural home, where she would have found duties and seen various aspects of life, she had little to interest or occupy her in her unsettled wanderings; and to her the sap of life was in books, in dreams, in the love of her brother and sisters, and in discussions with Miss King; her favourite vision for the future, the going to live with Walter at Thornton Conway when he should be of age. But Walter was younger than Louisa, and it was a very distant prospect.

Her characteristic was a calm, serene indifference, in which her stepmother acquiesced, as lovers of peace do in what they cannot help; and the more willingly, that her tranquil dignity and pensive grace exactly suited the style of her tall queenly figure, delicate features, dark soft languid eyes, and clear olive complexion, just tinged with rosebud pink.

What Louis said of her to his tutor on the Monday night of their arrival was beyond the bounds of all reason; and it was even more memorable that Jem was neither satirical nor disputatious, assented to all, and if he sighed, it was after his door was shut.

A felicitous day ensued, spent by James in shooting, by Fitz-jocelyn in the drawing-room; whither Mrs. Mansell had requested Isabel's presence, as a favour to herself. The young lady sat at work, seldom raising her eyes, but this was enough for him; his intense admiration and pleasure in her presence so exhilarated him, that he rattled away to the utmost. Louisa was at first the excuse. In no further doubt of his good-nature, she spent an hour in the morning in giving him anagrams to guess; and after she had repaired to the schoolroom, he went on inventing fresh ones, and transposing the ivory letters, rambling on in his usual style of pensive drollery. Happiness never set him off to advantage, and either there was more froth

than ordinary, or it appeared unusually ridiculous to an audience who did not detect the under-current of reflection. His father would have been in despair, Mrs. Ponsonby or Mary would have interposed; but the ladies of Beauchastel laughed and encouraged him,—all but Isabel, who sat in the window, and thought of Adeline, 'spighted and angered both,' by a Navarrese coxcomb, with sleeves down to his heels, and shoes turned up to his knees. She gave herself great credit for having already created him a Viscount.

In the afternoon, Louis drove out lionizing with his aunt; but though the ponies stopped of themselves at all the notable views; sea, hill, and river were lost on him. Lady Conway could have drawn out a far less accessible person, and her outpouring of his own sentiments made him regard her as perfect.

She consulted him about her winter's resort. Louisa required peculiar care, and she had thought of trying mineral baths—what was thought of Northwold? what kind of houses were there? The Northwold faculty themselves might have taken a lesson from Fitzjocelyn's eloquent analysis of the chemical properties of the waters, and all old Mr. Frost's spirit would seem to have descended on him when he dilated on the House Beautiful. Lodgers for Miss Faithfull! what jubilee they would cause! And such lodgers! No wonder he was in ecstasy. All the evening the sound of his low, deliberate voice was unceasing, and his calm announcements to his two little cousins were each one more startling than the last; while James, to whom it was likewise all sunshine, was full of vivacity, and a shrewd piquancy of manner that gave zest to all he said, and wonderfully enlivened the often rather dull circle at Beauchastel.

Morning came; and when the ladies descended to breakfast, it was found that Lord Fitzjocelyn had gone out with the sportsmen. The children lamented, and their elders pronounced a young gentleman's passion for shooting to be quite incalculable. When, late in the day, the party returned, it was reported that he did not appear to care much for the sport; but had walked beside Mr. Mansell's shooting-pony, and had finally gone with him to see his model farm. This was a sure road to the old squire's heart, and no one was more delighted with the guest. For Aunt Catharine's sake, Louis was always attracted by old age, and his attentive manners had won Mr. Mansell's heart, even before his inquiries about his hobby had completed the charm. To expound and to listen to histories of agricultural experiments that really answered, was highly satisfactory to both, and all the evening they were eager over the great account-book which was the pride of the squire's heart; while Virginia and Louisa grumbled or looked imploring, and Isabel marvelled at there being any interest for any one in old Mr. Mansell's conversation.

'What is the meaning of this?' asked James, as they went up-stairs.

Louis shrugged like a Frenchman, looked *debonnaire*, and said 'Good night.'

Again he came down; prepared for shooting, though both pale and lame; but he quietly put aside all expostulations, walking on until, about fifty yards from the house, a pebble, turning under the injured foot, caused such severe pain that he could but just stagger to a tree and sit down.

There was much battling before Mr. Mansell would consent to leave him, or he to allow James to help him back to the house, before going on to overtake the party.

Very irate was Jem, at folly that seemed to have undone the benefits of the last month, and at changeableness that was a desertion of the queen to whom all homage was due. He was astonished that Louis turned into the study, a room little inhabited in general, and said, 'Make haste—you will catch the others; don't fall in with the ladies.'

'I mean to send your aunt to you.'

'Pray don't. Can't you suppose that peace is grateful after having counted every mortal hour last night?'

'Was that the reason you were going to walk ten miles without a leg to stand upon? Fitzjocelyn! is this systematic?'

'What is?' said Louis, wearily.

'Your treatment of—your aunt.'

'On what system should aunts be treated?'

'Of all moments to choose for caprice! Exactly when I thought even you were fixed!'

'*Pur troppo*,' sighed Louis.

'Ha!' cried Jem, 'you have not gone and precipitated matters! I thought you could never amaze me again; but even you might have felt she was a being to merit *rather* more time and respect!'

'*Even* I am not devoid of the organ of veneration.'

His meek tone was a further provocation; and with uplifted chin, hair ruffled like the crest of a Shetland pony, flashing eyes, and distinct enunciation, James exclaimed, 'You will excuse me for not understanding you. You come here; you devote yourself to your aunt and cousins—you seem strongly attracted; then, all on a sudden, you rush out shooting—an exercise for which you don't care, and when you can't walk: you show the most pointed neglect. And after being done-up yesterday, you repeat the experiment to-day, as if for the mere object of laming yourself for life. I could understand pique or temper, but you have not the—'

'The sense,' said Louis; 'no, nor anything to be piqued at.'

'If there be a motive,' said James, 'I have a right to demand not to be trifled with any longer.'

'I wish you could be content to shoot your birds, and leave me in peace: you will only have your fun spoilt, like mine, and go into a fury. The fact is, that my father writes in a state of perturbation. He says, I might have understood, from the

tenor of his conduct, that he did not wish me to be intimate with my aunt's family ! He cannot know anything about them, for it is all one warning against fashion and frivolity. He does not blame us—especially not you.'

'I wish he did.'

'But he desires that our intercourse should be no more than propriety demands, and plunges into a discourse against first impressions, beauty, and the like.'

'So that's the counterblast.'

'You ought to help me, Jem,' said Louis, dejectedly.

'I'll help you with all my heart to combat your father's prejudices.'

'An hour's unrestrained intercourse with these people would best destroy them,' said Louis ; but, in the meantime—I wonder what he means.'

'He means that he is in terror for his darling scheme.'

'Mrs Ponsonby was very right,' sighed Louis.

'Ay ! A pretty condition you would be in, if she had not had too much principle to let you be a victim to submission. That's what you'll come to, though ! You will never know the meaning of passion ; you will escape something by it, though you will be twisted round his lordship's finger, and marry his choice. I hope she will have red hair !'

'Negative and positive obedience stand on different grounds,' said Louis, with such calmness as often fretted James, but saved their friendship. 'Besides, till I had this letter, I had no notion of any such thing.'

James's indignation resulted in fierce stammering ; while Louis deliberately continued a *vivâ voce* self-examination, with his own quaint *naïveté*, betraying emotion only by the burning colour of cheek and brow.

'No ; I had no such notion. I only felt that her presence had the gladdening, inspiring, calming effect of moonlight or starlight. I revered her as a dream of poetry walking the earth. Ha ! now one hears the sound of it—that *is* like it ! I did not think it was such a confirmed case. I should have gone on in peace but for this letter, and never thought about it at all.'

'So much the better for you !'

'My father is too just and candid not to own his error, and be thankful.'

'And you expect her to bear with your alternations in the meantime ?'

'Towards her I have not alternated. When I have made giggle with Clara under the influence of the starry sky, did you suppose me giggling with Lyra or the Pleiades ? I should dread to see the statue descend ; it seemed irreverence even to gaze. The lofty serenity keeps me aloof. I like to believe in a creature too bright and good for human nature's daily food. Our profane squinting through telescopes at the Lady Moon reveals nothing but worn-out volcanoes and dry oceans, black gulfs and

scorched desolation ; but verily that may not be Lady Moon's fault—only that of our base inventions. So I would be content to mark her—Isabel, I mean—queenly, moonlike name !—walk in beauty and tranquillity unruffled, without distorting my vision by personal aims at bringing her down to my level. There—don't laugh at me, Jem.'

'No, I am too sorry for you.'

'Why?' he exclaimed, impatient of compassion ; 'do you think it desperate?'

'I see your affection given to a most worthy object, and I know what your notions of submission will end in.'

'Once for all, Jem,' said Fitzjocelyn, 'do you know how you are using my father? No ; Isabel Conway may be the happiness or the disappointment of my life—I cannot tell. I am sure my father is mistaken, and I believe he may be convinced ; but I am bound not to fly in the face of his direct commands, and, till we can come to an understanding, I must do the best I can, and trust to—'

The last word was lost, as he turned to nurse his ankle, and presently to entreat James to join the sportsmen ; but Jem was in a mood to do nothing pleasing to himself nor to any one else. A sacrifice is usually irritating to the spectators, who remonstrate rather than listen to self-reproach ; and Louis had been guilty of three great offences—being in the right, making himself ridiculous, and submitting tamely—besides the high-treason to Isabel's beauty. It was well that the Earl was safe out of the way of the son of the Pendragons !

Fitzjocelyn was in pain and discomfort enough to make James unwilling to leave him ; though his good-will did not prevent him from keeping up such a stream of carplings and sinister auguries, that it was almost the climax of good-temper that enabled Louis to lie still, trying to read a great quarto Park's *Travels*, and abstaining from any reply that could aggravate matters. As the one would not go to luncheon, the other would not ; and after watching the sound of the ladies' setting out for their drive, Louis said that he would go and lie on the turf ; but at that moment the door was thrown open, and in ran Virginia. Explanations were quickly exchanged—how she had come to find Vertot's *Malta* for Isabel, and how he had been sent in by hurting his foot.

'Were you going to stay in all day?' said Virginia. 'Oh, come with us ! We have the pony-carriage ; and we are going to a dear old ruin, walking and driving by turns. Do, pray, come ; there's plenty of room.'

There could be no objection to the schoolroom party, and it was no small relief to escape from James and hope he was amused ; so Fitzjocelyn allowed himself to be dragged off in triumph, and James was acceding to his entreaty that he would go in search of the shooting-party, when, as they reached the hall-door, they beheld Miss Conway waiting on the steps.

There was no receding for her any more than for Louis, so she could only make a private resolution against the pony-carriage, and dedicate herself to the unexceptionable company of little sister, governess and tutor ; for James had resigned the shooting, and attached himself to the expedition. It was an excellent opportunity of smoothing his cousin's way, and showing that all was not caprice that might so appear : so he began to tell of his most advantageous traits of character, and to explain away his whimsical conduct, with great ardour and ingenuity. He thought he should be perfectly satisfied if he could win but one smile of approbation from that gravely beautiful mouth ; and it came at last, when he told of Fitzjocelyn's devoted affection to Mrs. Frost and his unceasing kindness to the old ladies of Dynevor Terrace. Thus gratified, he let himself be led into abstract questions of principle,—a style of discussion frequent between Miss King and Isabel, but on which the latter had never seen the light of a man's mind thrown except through books. The gentlemen whom she had met were seldom either deep or earnest, except those too much beyond her reach ; and she had avoided anything like confidence or intimacy : but Mr. Dynevor could enlighten and vivify her perplexed reflections, answer her inquiries, confirm her opinion of books, and enter into all that she ventured with diffidence to express. He was enchanted to find that no closer approach could dim the lustre of Louis's moon, and honoured her doubly for what she had made herself in frivolous society. He felt sure that his testimony would gain credit where Fitzjocelyn's would be regarded as love-blinded, and already beheld himself forcing full proof of her merits on the reluctant Earl, beholding Louis happy, and Isabel emancipated from constraint.

A five miles' walk gave full time for such blissful discoveries ; for Miss Conway was resolute against entering the pony-carriage, and walked on, protesting against ever being fatigued ; while Louis was obliged to occupy his seat in the carriage, with a constant change of companions.

'I think, my dear,' said Miss King, when the younger girls had gone to their mother's toilette, 'that you will have to forgive me.'

'Meaning,' said Isabel, 'that you are bitten too ! Ah ! Miss King, you could not withstand the smile with which he handed you in !'

'Could you withstand such an affectionate account of your cruel, tyrannical practical joker ?'

'Facts are stubborn things. Do you know what Mr. Dynevor is doing at this moment ? I met him in the gallery, hurrying off to Ebbscreek for some lotion for Lord Fitzjocelyn's ankle. I begged him to let Mrs. Mansell send ; but no—no one but himself could find it, and his cousin could not bear strangers to disarrange his room. If anything were wanting, it would be enough to see how simply and earnestly such a man has been brought to pamper—nay, to justify, almost to adore, the whims and follies of this youth.'

‘If anything were wanting to what? To your dislike.’

‘It would not be so active as dislike, unless—’ Isabel spoke with drooping head, and Miss King did not ask her to finish, but said, ‘He has not given you much cause for alarm.’

‘No; he is at least a thorough gentleman. It may be conceit, or wrong self-consciousness, but from the moment the poor boy was spied in the shop, I had a perception that mamma and Mrs. Mansell marked him down. Personally he would be innocent; but, through all his chatter, I cannot shake off the fancy that I am watched, or that decided indifference is not needed to keep him at a distance.’

‘I wish you could have seen him without knowing him!’

‘In vain, dear Miss King! I can’t bear handsome men. I see his frivolity and shallowness; and for amiability, what do you think of keeping his cousin all the morning from shooting for such a mere nothing, and then sending him off for a ten miles’ walk?’

‘For my part, I confess that I was struck with the good sense and kindness he showed in our *tête-à-tête*—I thought it justified Mr. Dynevor’s description.’

‘Yes, I have no doubt that there is some good in him. He might have done very well, if he had not always been an idol.’

Isabel was the more provoked with Lord Fitzjocelyn, when, by and by, he appeared in the drawing-room, and related the result of his cousin’s mission. Jem, who *would* know better than himself where to find his property, had not chosen to believe his description of the spot where he had left the lotion; and, in the twilight, Louis had found his foot coiled about by the feelers and claws of a formidable monster—no other than a bottled scorpion, a recent present from Captain Hannaford. He did not say how emblematic the scorpion lotion was of that which Jem had been administering to his wounded spirit all the morning, but he put the story in so ludicrous a light that Isabel decided that Mr. Dynevor was ungenerously and ungratefully treated as a butt; and she turned away in displeasure from the group whom the recital was amusing, to offer her sympathy to the tutor, and renew the morning’s conversation.

CHAPTER XIII

FROSTY, BUT KINDLY

Go not eastward, go not westward,
For a stranger whom we know not.
Like a fire upon the hearthstone,
Is a neighbour’s homely daughter;
Like the moonlight or the starlight,
Is the handsomest of strangers.—*Legend of Hiawatha*

WHAT a laboured production had the letter been! How many copies had the statesman written! how late had he sat over it

at night ! how much more consideration had he spent on it than on papers involving the success of his life ! A word too much or too little might precipitate the catastrophe, and the bare notion of his son's marriage with a pupil of Lady Conway renewed and gave fresh poignancy to the past.

At first his anxieties were past mention ; but he grew restless under them, and the instinct of going to Mrs. Ponsonby prevailed. At least, she would know what had transpired from James, or from Fitzjocelyn to Mrs. Frost.

She had heard of ecstatic letters from both the cousins, and Mary had been delighted to identify Miss Conway with the Isabel of whom one of her school friends spoke rapturously ; but the last letter had been from James to his grandmother, declaring that Lord Ormersfield was destroying the happiness of the most dutiful of sons, who was obedient even to tameness, and so absurd that there was no bearing him. His lordship must hear reason, and learn that he was rejecting the most admirable creature in existence, her superiority of mind exceeding even her loveliness of person. He had better beware of tyranny ; it was possible to abuse submission, and who could answer for the consequences of thwarting strong affections ? All the ground Fitzjocelyn had gained in the last six weeks had been lost ; and for the future, James would not predict.

'An uncomfortable matter,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, chiefly for the sake of reading her daughter's feelings. 'If it were not in poor Louis's mind already, his father and James would plant it there by their contrary efforts.'

'Oh ! I hope it will come right,' said Mary. 'Louis is too good, and his father too kind, for it not to end well. And then, mamma, he will be able to prove, what nobody will believe—that he is constant.'

'You think so, do you ?' said her mother, smiling.

Mary blushed, but answered, 'Where he really cared, he would be constant. His fancy might be taken, and he might rave, but he would never really like what was not good.—If he does think about Miss Conway, we may trust she is worthy of him. Oh ! I should like to see her !'

Mary's eyes lighted up with an enthusiasm that used to be a stranger to them. It was not the over-acted indifference nor the tender generosity of disappointment : it seemed more to partake of the fond, unselfish, elder-sisterly affection that she had always shown towards Louis, and it set her mother quite at ease.

Seeing Lord Ormersfield riding into the terrace, Mary set out for a walk, that he might have his *tête-à-tête* freely with her mother. On coming home, she met him on the stairs ; and he spoke with a sad softness and tone of pardon that alarmed her so much, that she hastened to ask her mother whether Louis had really avowed an attachment.

'Oh no,' said Mrs. Ponsonby ; 'he has written a very right-

mind letter, on the whole, poor boy ! though he is sure the Conways have only to be known to be appreciated. Rather too true ! It is in his Miss Fanny hand, stiff and dispirited ; and his father has worked himself into such a state of uneasiness, that I think it will end in his going to Ebbscreek at once.'

'O mamma, you won't let him go and torment Louis?'

'Why, Mary, have you been learning of James ? Perhaps he would torment him more from a distance ; and besides, I doubt what sort of counsellor James is likely to make in his present mood.'

'I never could see that James made any difference to Louis,' said Mary. 'I know people think he does, because Louis gives up wishes and plans to him ; but he is not led in opinions or principles, as far as I can see.'

'Not unless his own wishes went the same way.'

'At least, Lord Ormersfield will see Miss Conway !'

'I am afraid that will do no good. It will not be for the first time. Lady Conway has been his dread from the time of his own marriage ; and if she should come to Northwold, he will be in despair. I do think he must be right ; she must be making a dead set at Louis.'

'Not Miss Conway,' said Mary. 'I know she must be good, or he would not endure her for a moment.'

'Mary, you not do know the power of beauty.'

'I have heard of it,' said Mary ; 'I have seen how Doña Guadalupe was followed. But those people were not like Louis. No, mamma ; I think James might be taken in, I don't think Louis could be—unless he had a very grand dream of his own before his eyes ; and then it would be his own dream, not the lady that he saw ; and by and by he would find it out, and be so vexed !'

'And, I trust, before he had committed himself !'

'Mamma, I won't have you think Miss Conway anything but up to his dreams ! I know she is. Only think what Jane Drummond says of her !'

When the idea of going to see how matters stood had once occurred to the Earl, he could not stay at home : the ankle and the affections preyed on him by turns, and he wrote to Sir Miles Oakstead to fix an earlier day for the promised visit, as well as to his son, to announce his speedy arrival. Then he forgot the tardiness of cross-country posts, and outran his letter, so that he found no one to meet him at Bickleypool ; and on driving up to the gate at Ebbscreek, found all looking deserted. After much knocking, Priscilla appeared, round-eyed and gasping, and verified his worst fears with 'Gone to Bo-chattle.' However, she explained that only one gentleman was gone to dine there ; the other was rowing him round the point, with grandfather ;—they would soon be back—indeed they ought, for the tide was so low, they would have to land down by the shingle bar.

She pointed out where the boat must come in ; and thither the Earl directed his steps, feeling as if he were going to place himself under a nutmeg-grater, as he thought how James Frost would receive the implied distrust of his guardianship.

The sunset gleam was fading on the sleepy waves that made but a feint of breaking, along the shining expanse of moist uncovered sand, when two figures were seen progressing from the projecting rocks, casting long shadows before them. Lord Ormersfield began to prepare a mollifying address—but, behold ! Was it the effect of light so much to lengthen Jem's form ? nay, was it making him walk with a stick ? A sudden, unlooked-for hope seized the Earl. The next minute he had been recognized ; and in the grasping hands and meeting eyes, all was forgotten, save the true, fond affection of father and son.

'I did not expect this pleasure. They told me you were dining out.'

'Only rowing Jem to the landing-place. I told him to make my excuses. It is a dinner to half the neighbourhood, and my foot is always troublesome if I do not lay it up in the evening.'

'I am glad you are prudent,' said his father, dismissing his fears in his gratification, and proceeding to lay his coming to the score of the foot.

Fitzjocelyn did not wish to see through the plea—he was much too happy in his father's unusual warmth and tenderness, and in the delights of hospitality. Mrs. Hannaford was gone out, and eatables were scarce ; but a tea dinner was prepared merrily between Priscilla, the Captain, and Louis, who gloried in displaying his school-fagging accomplishments with toast, eggs, and rashers—hobbled between parlour and kitchen, helping Priscilla, joking with the Captain, and waiting on his father so eagerly and joyously as to awaken a sense of adventure and enjoyment in the Earl himself. No meal, with Frampton behind his chair, had ever equalled Fitzjocelyn's cookery or attendance ; and Louis's reminiscences of the penalties he had suffered from his seniors for burnt toast, awoke like recollections of schoolboy days, hitherto in utter oblivion, and instead of the intended delicate conversation, father and son found themselves laughing over a '*tirocinium* or review of schools.'

Still, the subject must be entered on ; and when Lord Ormersfield had mentioned the engagement to go to Oakstead, he added, 'All is well, since I have found you here. Let me tell you that I never felt more grateful nor more relieved than by this instance of regard for my wishes.'

Though knowing the fitful nature of Louis's colour, he would have been better satisfied not to have called up such an intensity of red, and to have had some other answer than, 'I wish you saw more of them.'

'I see them every year in London.'

'London gives so little scope for real acquaintance,' ventured Louis again, with downcast eyes.

'You forget that Lady Conway is my sister-in-law.' Louis would have spoken, but his father added, 'Before you were born, I had full experience of her. You must take it on trust that her soft, prepossessing manners belong to her as a woman of the world who cannot see you without designs on you.'

'Of course,' said Louis, 'I yield to your expressed wishes; but my aunt has been very kind to me: and,' he added, after trying to mould the words to their gentlest form, 'you could not see my cousins without being convinced that it is the utmost injustice—'

'I do not censure them,' said his father, as he hesitated between indignation and respect; 'I only tell you, Louis, that nothing could grieve me more than to see your happiness in the keeping of a pupil of Lady Conway.'

He met a look full of consternation, and of struggles between filial deference and the sense of injustice. All Louis allowed himself to say was, however, 'Surely, when I am her own nephew! when our poverty is a flagrant fact—she may be acquitted of anything but caring for me for—my mother's sake.'

There was a silence that alarmed Louis, who had never before named his mother to the Earl. At last, Lord Ormersfield spoke clearly and sternly, in characteristic succinct sentences, but taking breath between each. 'You shall have no reason to think me prejudiced. I will tell you facts. There was a match which she desired for such causes as lead her to seek you. The poverty was greater, and she knew it. On one side there was strong affection; on that which she influenced there was—none whatever. If there were scruples, she smothered them. She worked on a young innocent mind to act out her deceit, and without a misgiving on—on his part that his feelings were not returned, the marriage took place.'

'It could not have been all her own fault,' cried Louis. 'It must have been a willing instrument—much to blame—'

His father cut him short with sudden severity, such as startled him. 'Never say so, Louis. She was a mere child, educated for that sole purpose; her most sweet and docile nature wasted and perverted.'

'And you know this of your own knowledge?' said Fitz-jocelyn, still striving to find some loophole to escape from such testimony.

The Earl paused, as if to collect himself, then repeated the words, slowly and decidedly, 'Of my own knowledge. I could not have spoken thus otherwise.'

'May I ask how it ended?'

'As those who marry for beauty alone have a right to expect. There was neither confidence nor sympathy. She died early. I—we—those who loved her as their own life—were thankful.'

Louis perceived the strong effort and great distress with which these words were uttered, and ventured no answer, glancing hastily through all his connections to guess whose history

could thus deeply affect his father; but he was entirely at a loss; and Lord Ormersfield, recovering himself, added, 'Say no more of this; but, believe me, it was to spare you from her manœuvres that I kept you apart from that family.'

'The Northwold baths have been recommended for Louisa,' said Fitzjocelyn. 'Before we knew of your objections, we mentioned Miss Faithfull's lodgings.'

What the Earl was about to utter, he suppressed.

'You cannot look at those girls and name manœuvring!' cried Louis.

'Poor things.'

After a silence, Lord Ormersfield added, with more anxiety than prudence, 'Set my mind at rest, Louis. There can have been no harm done yet, in so short a time.'

'I—don't—know—' said Louis, slowly. 'I have seldom spoken to her, to be sure. She actually makes me shy! I never saw anything half so lovely. I cannot help her reigning over my thoughts. I shall never believe a word against *her*, though I cannot dispute what you say of my aunt. She is of another mould. I wish you could let me hope that—'

A gesture of despair from his father cut him short.

'I will do whatever you please,' he concluded.

'You will find that time conquers the fancy,' said the Earl, quickly. 'I am relieved to find that you have at least not committed yourself: it would be no compliment to Mary Ponsonby.'

Louis's lip curled somewhat; but he said no more, and made no objections to the arrangements which his father proceeded to detail. Doubtful of the accommodations of Ebbscreek, Lord Ormersfield had prudently retained his fly; and though Louis, intending to sleep on the floor, protested that there was plenty of room, he chose to return to the inn at Bickleypool. He would call for Louis to-morrow, to take him for a formal call at Beauchastel; and the day after they would go together to Oakstead, leaving James to return home, about ten days sooner than had been previously concerted.

Lord Ormersfield had not been gone ten minutes, before James's quick bounding tread was heard far along the dry woodland paths. He vaulted over the gate, and entered by the open window, exclaiming, as he did so, 'Hurrah! The deed is done; the letter is off to engage the House Beautiful.'

'Doom is doom!' were the first words that occurred to Louis. 'The lion and the prince.'

'What's that?'

'There was once a king,' began Louis, as if the tale were the newest in the world, 'whose son was predestined to be killed by a lion. After much consideration, his Majesty enclosed his royal highness in a tower, warranted wild-beast proof, and forbade the chase to be mentioned in his hearing. The result was, that the locked-up prince died of lock-jaw in consequence of tearing his hand with a nail in the picture of the lion.'

'I shall send that apologue straight to Ormersfield.'

'You may spare that trouble. My father has been with me all the evening.'

'Oh! his double-ganger visits you. That accounts for your freaks.'

'Double-gangers seldom come in yellow-bodied flies.'

'His lordship *in propria persona*. You don't mean it.'

'He is sleeping at the "George" at Bickleypool. There is a letter coming to-morrow by the post, to say he is coming to-day, with every imaginable civility to you; but I am to go to the rose-coloured pastor's with him on Wednesday.'

'So there's an end of our peace and comfort!'

'I am afraid we have sadly discomposed his peace.'

'Did you discover whether his warnings have the slightest foundation?'

'He told me a history that somewhat accounts for his distrust of my aunt. I think there must be another side to it, and nothing can be more unjust than to condemn all the family; but it affected him so exceedingly that I do not wonder at his doing so. He gave no names, but I am sure it touched him very nearly. Can you tell who it could have been?' And he narrated enough to make James exclaim—'It ought to touch him nearly. He was talking of himself.'

'Impossible!—my mother!' cried Louis, leaping up.

'Yes—his own version of his married life.'

'How do you know? You cannot remember it,' said Louis, though too well convinced, as he recollected the suppressed anguish, and the horror with which all blame of the young wife had been silenced.

'I have heard of it again and again. It was an unhappy, ill-assorted marriage: she was gay, he was cold.'

'My Aunt Catharine says so?'

'As far as she can blame anything. Your mother was a sweet blossom in a cold wind. She loved and pitied her with all her heart. Your aunt was talking, this very evening, of your father having carried her sister to Ormersfield, away from all her family; and one reason of her desire to go to Northwold is to see those who were with her at last.'

Louis was confounded. 'Yes! I see,' he said. 'How obtuse not to read it in his own manner! How much it explains!' and he silently rested his brow on his hands.

'Depend upon it, there are two sides to the story. I would not be a pretty, petted, admired girl in his keeping.'

'Do you think it mends matters with me to fasten blame on either?' said Louis, sadly. 'No; I was realizing the perception of such a thread of misery woven into his life, and thinking how little I have felt for him.'

'Endowing him with your own feelings, and then feeling for him!'

'No. I cannot estimate his feeling. He is of harder, firmer

stuff than I ; and for that very reason, I suspect, suffering is a more terrific thing. I heard the doctors say, when I bore pain badly, that it would probably do the less future harm : a bad moral, but I believe it is true of the mental as of the physical constitution.' Answering something between a look and a shrug of James, he mused on, aloud—'I understand better what the wreck of affection must have been.'

'For my part,' said James, 'I do not believe in the affection that can tyrannize over and blight a woman.'

'Nay, James ! I cannot doubt. My very name—my having been called by it, are the more striking in one so fond of usage and precedent. Things that passed between him and Mrs. Ponsonby, while I was ill—much that I little regarded and ill requited—show what force of love and grief there must have been. The cold, grave manner is the broken, inaccessible edge of the cliff rent asunder.'

'If romance softens the rough edge, you are welcome to it ! I may as well go to bed !'

'Not romance—the sad reality of my poor father's history. I trust I shall never treat his wishes so lightly—'

Impatient of one-sided sympathy, James exclaimed, 'As if you did not give way to him like a slave !'

'Yes, like a slave,' said Louis, gravely. 'I wish to give way like a son who would try to comfort him for what he has undergone.'

'Now, I should have thought your feeling would have been for your mother ?'

'If my mother could speak to me,' said Louis, with trembling lips, 'she would surely bid me to try my utmost, as far as in me lies, to bring peace and happiness to my father. I cannot tell where the errors may have been, and I will never ask. If she was as like to me as they say, I could understand some of them ! At least, I know that I am doubly bound to give as little vexation to him as possible ; and I trust that you will not make it harder to me. You lost your father so early, that you can hardly estimate—'

'The trial ?' said James, willing to give what had passed the air of a joke.

'Exactly so. Good night.'

CHAPTER XIV

NEW INHABITANTS

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad—
 Sometimes a curly shepherd lad,
 Or long-haired page in crimson clad,
 Goes by to towered Camelot;
 And sometimes, through the mirror blue,
 The knights come riding two and two.
 She hath no loyal knight and true—
 The Lady of Shalott.—TENNYSON

‘Oakstead, Oct. 14th, 1847.

‘MY DEAR AUNT,—I find that Fitzjocelyn is writing to you ; but I think you will wish for a fuller account of him than can be obtained from his own letters. Indeed, I should be much obliged if you would kindly exercise your influence to persuade him that he is not in a condition to be imprudent with impunity. Sir Miles Oakstead was absolutely shocked to see the alteration in his appearance, as well as in his spirits ; and although both our kind host and hostess are most solicitous on his account, it happens unfortunately that they are at this juncture quite alone, so that he is without companions of his own age. I must not, however, alarm you. The fact is, that circumstances have occurred which, though he has acted in the most exemplary manner, have harassed and distressed him a good deal ; and his health suffers from the difficulty of taking sufficient exercise. James will triumph when he hears that I regret having shortened his stay by the sea-side ; for neither the place nor the weather seems to agree with him : he has had a recurrence of wakeful nights, and is very languid. Poor boy ! yesterday he wandered out alone in the rain, lost his way, and came home so fatigued that he slept for three hours on the sofa ; but to-day he seems better—has more colour, and has been less silent. We go to Leffingham Castle from Monday till Thursday, when I shall take him to London for Hastings to decide whether it be fit for him to return to Christchurch after the vacation, according to his own most anxious wish. With my love to Mary Ponsonby and her daughter, and best remembrances to James,

‘Your affectionate nephew,
 ‘ORMERSFIELD.’

The same envelope contained another letter of many sheets, beginning in a scrawl :—

‘Scene—Rose-coloured Pastor’s Nest. Tables, chairs, books, papers, despatch-boxes. The two ex-ministers writing and consulting. Viscount F. looking on like a colt running beside its parent at plough, thinking that harness leaves deep marks, and that he does not like the furrow.

'October 13th, 1847.—That correct date must be a sign that he is getting into harness.

'Well, dear Aunt Kitty, to make a transition from the third to the first person, like Mrs. Norris, you have in this short scene an epitome of the last fortnight. Lady Oakstead is an honourable matron, whom I pity for having me in her way; a man unable to be got rid of by the lawful exercises of shooting and riding, and with a father always consulting her about him, and watching every look and movement, till the blood comes throbbing to my temples by the mere attraction of his eyes. To be watched into a sense of impatience and ingratitude, is a trial of life for which one is not prepared. My father and Sir Miles are very busy; I hang here an anomaly, sitting with them as being less in their way than in Lady Oakstead's, and wondering what I shall be twenty years hence. I am sick of the only course of life that will content my father, and I can see no sunshine likely to brighten it. But, at least, no one's happiness is at stake but my own. Here is a kind, cordial letter from Lady Conway, pressing me to join her at Scarborough, make expeditions, &c. My father is in such a state about me, that I believe I could get his consent to anything; but I suppose it would not be fair, and I have said nothing to him as yet. On Monday we go to Leffingham, which, I hear, is formality itself. After that, more state visits, unless I can escape to Oxford. My father fancies me not well enough; but pray unite all the forces of the Terrace to impress that nothing else will do me any good. Dragging about in this dreary, heartless way is all that ails me, and reading for my degree would be the best cure. I mean to work hard for honours, and, if possible, delude myself with hopes of success. Work is the need. Here, there is this one comfort. There is no one to talk to, "no birds in last year's nest," sons absent, daughters disposed of; but, unluckily, the Pastoress, under a mistaken sense of kindness, has asked the Vicar's son to walk with me, and he is always lying in wait,—an Ensign in a transition state between the sheepish schoolboy and the fast man, with an experience of three months of *dépôt*. Having roused him from the pristine form, I regret the alternative.

'Did I ever write so savage a letter? Don't let it vex you, or I won't send it. What a bull! There is such a delectable Scotch mist, that no one will suspect me of going out; and I shall actually cheat the Ensign, and get a walk in solitude to hearten me for the dismal state dinner-party of the evening.

'October 14th.—Is it in the book of fate that I should always treat this rose-coloured pastor like a carrion crow? I have done it again! And it has but brought out more of my father's marvellous kindness and patience.

'I plunged into the Scotch mist unsuspected and unpursued. The visible ebullition of discontent had so much disgusted me that I must needs see whether anything could be done with it,

and fairly face the matter, as I can only do in a walk. Pillow counsel is feverish and tumultuous ; one is hardly master of oneself. The soft, cool, mist-laden air, heavy but incense-breathing, was a far more friendly adjunct in the quiet decay of nature—mournful, but not foul nor corrupt, because man had not spoilt it. It suited me better than a sunny, glaring day, such as I used to revel in, and the brightness of which, last spring, made me pine to be in the free air. Such days are past with me ; I had better know that they are, and not strive after them. Personal happiness is the lure, not the object, in this world. I have my Northwold home, and I am beginning to see that my father's comfort depends on me as I little imagined, and sufficiently to sweeten any sacrifice. So I have written to refuse Scarborough, for there is no use in trying to combine two things, pleasing my father and myself. I wish the determination may last ; but mine have never been good for much, and you must help me.

‘Neither thinking nor fog conduced to seeing where I was going ; and when my ankle began to give out, and I was going to turn, I ran into a hedge, which, looming through the mist, I had been taking for a fine range of distant mountains—rather my way of dealing with other objects. Being without a horse on whose neck to lay the reins, I could only coast the hedge, hoping it might lead me back to Oakstead Park, which I had abandoned in my craving for space and dread of being dogged by the Ensign. But the treacherous hedge led me nowhere but to a horse-pond ; and when I had struggled out of the adjacent mire, and attained a rising ground, I could only see about four yards square of bare down, all the rest being gray fog. Altogether, the scene was worth something. I heard what I thought the tinkling of a sheep bell through the cloud, which dulled the sound like cotton wool ; I pursued the call, when anon, the veil began to grow thin, and revealed, looking just like a transparency, a glimpse of a little village in a valley almost under my feet, trees, river, church-spire and all, and the bell became clearer, and showed me what kind of flock it was meant for. I turned that way, and had just found a path leading down the steep, when down closed the cloud—a natural dissolving view—leaving me wondering whether it had been mirage or imagination, till presently, the curtain drew up in earnest. Out came, not merely form, but colour, as I have seen a camera clear itself—blue sky, purple hills, russet and orange woods, a great elm green picked out with yellow, a mass of brown oaks, a scarlet maple, a beech grove, skirting a brilliant water meadow, with a most reflective stream running through it, and giving occasion for a single-arched bridge, and a water-mill, with a wheel draped with white foam ; two swans disporting on the water (I would not declare they were not geese), a few cottony flakes of mist hanging over damp corners, the hill rising green with the bright whitewashed cottages of this district, on the

side a rich, red, sandstone-coloured church, late architecture, tower rather mouldering—all the more picturesque; churchyard, all white headstones and ochreous sheep, surmounted by a mushroom-shaped dark yew-tree, railed in with intensely white rails, the whole glowing in the parting *coup-de-soleil* of a wet day, every tear of every leaf glistening, and everything indescribably lustrous. It is a picture that one's mental photograph ought to stamp for life, and the cheering and interest it gave, no one but you can understand. I wished for you, I know. It looks so poor in words.

'After the service, I laid hold of the urchin whose hearty stare had most reminded me of Tom Madison, and gave him a shilling to guide me back to Oakstead, a wise measure, for down came the cloud, blotting all out like the Castle of St. John; and by the time I came home, it was pitch dark and raining hard, and my poor father was imagining me at the foot of another precipice. I was hoping to creep up in secret, but they all came out, fell upon me, Lady Oakstead sent me tea, and ordered me to rest; and so handsomely did I obey, that when next I opened my eyes, and saw my father waiting, as I thought, for me to go down to dinner with him, I found he had just come up after the ladies had quitted the dining-room. So kind and so little annoyed did he seem, that I shook myself, to be certified that I had broken no more bones, but it was all sheer forbearance and consideration—enough to go to one's heart—when it was the very thing to vex him most. With great penitence, I went down, and the first person I encountered was the very curate I had seen in my *mysterious* village, much as if he had walked out of a story book. On fraternizing, I found him to be a friend of Holdsworth. Lady Oakstead is going to take me, this afternoon, to see his church, &c., thoroughly; and behold, I learn from him that she is a notable woman for doing good in her parish, never so happy as in trotting to cottages, though her good deeds are always in the background. Thereupon, I ventured to attack her this morning on cottage garniture, and obtained the very counsel I wanted about ovens and piggeries; we began to get on together, and she is to put me up to all manner of information that I want particularly. I must go now, not to keep her waiting; never mind the first half of my letter—I have no time to cancel it now. I find my father wants to put in a note; don't believe a word that he says, for I am much better to-day, body and mind.

Goosey, goosey gander,
Where shall we wander,

'Anywhere, everywhere, to remain still

'Your most affectionate,

'FITS GOSLING.'

Dear Aunt Kitty! One of her failings was never to be able to keep a letter to herself. She fairly cried over her boy's

troubles ; and Mrs. Ponsonby would not have known whether to laugh or cry but for James's doleful predictions, which were so sentimental as to turn even his grandmother to the laughing party, and left him no sympathizer but Mary, who thought it very hard and cruel to deride Louis when he was trying so earnestly to be good and suffering so much. Why should they all—Aunt Catharine herself—be merry over his thinking the spring-days of his life passed away, and trying so nobly and patiently to resign himself ?

'It is the way of the world, Mary,' said James. 'People think they are laughing at the mistaking a flock of sheep for the army of Pentapolin of the naked arm, when they are really sneering at the lofty spirit taking the weaker side. They involve the sublime temper in the ridiculous accident, and laugh both alike to scorn.'

'Not mamma and Aunt Catharine,' said Mary. 'Besides, is not half the harm in the world done by not seeing where the sublime is invaded by the ridiculous ?'

'I see nothing ridiculous in the matter,' said James. 'His father has demanded an unjustifiable sacrifice. Fitzjocelyn yields and suffers.'

'I do believe Lord Ormersfield must relent ; you see how pleased he is, saying that Louis's conduct is exemplary.'

'He would sacrifice a dozen sons to one prejudice !'

'Perhaps Miss Conway will overcome the prejudice. I am sure, if he thinks Louis's conduct exemplary, Louis must have the sort of happiness he used to wish for most, and his father would do his very best to gratify him.'

That sentence was Mary's *cheval de bataille* in her discussions with James, who could never be alone with her without broaching the subject. The two cousins often walked together during James's month at Northwold. The town church was not very efficiently served, and was only opened in the morning and late evening on Sundays, without any afternoon prayers, and James was often in the habit of walking to Ormersfield church for the three o'clock service, and asking Mary to join him. Their return was almost always occupied in descriptions of Miss Conway's perfections, and Mary learnt to believe that two beings, evidently compounded of every creature's best, must be destined for each other.

'How well it is,' she thought, 'that I did not stand in the way. Oh ! how unhappy and puzzled I should be now. How thankful I am that dear mamma understood all for us so well ! How glad I am that Louis is waiting patiently, not doing anything self-willed. As long as his father says he is exemplary, it must make one happy ; and mamma will convince Lord Ormersfield. It will all turn out well ; and how delightful it will be to see him quite happy and settled !'

Mary and her mother had by this time taken root at Dynevor Terrace, and formed an integral part of the inhabitants. Their

newspaper went the round of the houses, their name was sent to the Northwold book-club and enrolled among the subscribers to local charities, and Miss Mercy Faithfull found that their purse and kitchen would bear deeper hauls than she could in general venture upon. Mary was very happy, working under her, and was a welcome and cheerful visitor to the many sick, aged, and sorrowful to whom she introduced her.

If Mary could only have induced Aunt Melicent to come and see with her own eyes, to know Mrs. Frost and the Faithfull sisters, and, above all, to see mamma in her own house, she thought one of her most eager wishes would have been fulfilled. But invite as she and her mother might, they could not move Miss Ponsonby from Bryanstone-square. Railroads and country were both her dread ; and she was not inclined to overcome her fears on behalf of a sister-in-law whom she forgave, but could not love.

‘You must give it up, my dear,’ said Mrs. Ponsonby. ‘I let the time for our amalgamation pass. Melicent and I were not tolerant of each other. Since she has given you back to me, I can love and respect her as I never did before ; but a little breach in youth becomes too wide in age for either repentance or your affection, my dear, to be able to span it.’

Mary saw what a relief it was that the invitations were not accepted, and though she was disappointed, she blamed herself for having wished otherwise. Tranquillity was such a boon to that wearied spirit, each day was so much gain that went by without the painful, fluttered look of distress ; and never had Mrs. Ponsonby had so much quiet enjoyment with her daughter and her aunt. Mary was perfectly contented in seeing her better, and had no aims beyond the present trivial, commonplace life, with so many to help by little ordinary services, and her mother serene and comfortable. Placid, and yet active, she went busily through the day, and did not forget the new pleasures to which Louis had opened her mind. She took up his books without a pang, and would say, briskly and unblushingly, to her mother, how strange it was that before she had been with him, she had never liked at all what she now cared for so much.

The winter portended no lack of excitement. Miss Faithfull’s rooms were engaged. When Miss Mercy ran in breathless to Mrs. Frost with the tidings, she little knew what feelings were excited ; the hope and fear ; the doubt and curiosity ; the sense of guilt towards the elder nephew, in not preventing what she could not prevent ; the rejoicing on behalf of the younger nephew ; the ladylike scorn of the motives that brought the lodgers ; yet the warm feeling towards what was dear to Louis and admired by Jem.

What a flapping and battering of carpets on the much-enduring stump ! What furious activity of Martha ! What eager help of little Charlotte, who was in a perfect trepidation of delight at the rumour that a real beauty, fit for a heroine, was

coming! What trotting hither and thither of Miss Mercy! What netting of blinds and stitching of chintz by Miss Salome! What envy and contempt on the part of other landladies on hearing that Miss Faithfull's apartments were engaged for the whole winter! What an anxious progress was Miss Mercy's, when she conducted Mrs. Frost and Mary to a final inspection! and what was her triumph when Mary, sitting down on the well-stuffed arm-chair, pronounced that people who would not come there did not understand what comfort was.

Every living creature gazed—Mrs. Frost through her blind, Mary behind her hydrangea in the balcony, Charlotte from her attic window,—when the lodgers disembarked in full force—two ladies, two children, one governess, three maids, two men, two horses, one King Charles's spaniel! Let it be what it might, it was a grand windfall for the Miss Faithfulls.

Mary's heart throbbed as the first carriage thundered upon the gravel, and a sudden swelling checked her voice as she was about to exclaim, 'There she is!' when the second lady emerged, and moved up the garden path. She was veiled and mantled; but accustomed as was Mary's eye to the Spanish figure and walk, the wonderful grace of movement and deportment struck her as the very thing her eye had missed ever since she left Peru. What the rest of the strangers were like, she knew not; she had only eyes for the creature who had won Louis's affection, and doubtless deserved it as all else that was precious.

'So they are come, Charlotte,' said Mrs. Frost, as the maiden demurely brought in the kettle.

'Yes, ma'am;' and stooping to put the kettle on, and growing carnation-coloured over the fire. 'Oh, ma'am, I never saw such a young lady. She is all one as the king's sister in *The Lord of the Isles*!'

While the object of all this enthusiasm was arriving at the Terrace, she was chiefly conscious that Sir Roland was sinking down on the ramparts of Acre, desperately wounded in the last terrible siege; and she was considering whether palmer or minstrel should carry the tidings of his death to Adeline. It was her refuge from the unpleasant feelings with which she viewed the experiment of the Northwold baths upon Louisa's health. As the carriage stopped, she cast one glance at the row of houses; they struck her as dreary and dilapidated; she drew her mantle closer, shivered, and walked into the house. 'Small rooms, dingy furniture—that is mamma's affair,' passed through her mind, as she made a courteous acknowledgment of Miss Mercy's greeting, and stood by the drawing-room fire. 'Roland slowly awoke from his swoon; a white-robed old man, with a red eight-pointed cross on his breast, was bending over him. He knew himself to be in—I can't remember which tower the Hospitaliers defended. I wonder whether Marianne can find the volume of Vertot.'

'Isabel, Isabel!' shrieked Virginia, who, with Louisa, had

been roaming everywhere ; 'here is a discovery in the school-room ! Come !'

It was an old framed print of a large house, as much of a sham castle as the nature of things would permit ; and beneath were the words 'Cheveleigh, the seat of Roland Dynevor, Esquire.'

'There !' cried Virginia : 'you see it is a castle, a dear old feudal castle ! Think of that, Isabel ! Why, it is as good as seeing Sir Roland himself, to have seen Mr. Dynevor Frost disinherited. Oh ! if his name were only Roland, instead of that horrid James !'

'His initials are J. R.,' said Isabel. 'It is a curious coincidence.'

'It only wants an Adeline to have the castle now,' said Louisa. 'Oh ! there *shall* be an heiress, and she *shall* be beautiful, and he sha'n't go crusading—he *shall* marry her.'

The sisters had not been aware that the schoolroom maid, who had been sent on to prepare, was busy unpacking in a corner of the room. 'They say, Miss Louisa,' she interposed, 'that Mr. Frost is going to be married to a great heiress—his cousin, Miss Ponsonby, at No. 7.'

Isabel requited the forwardness by silently leaving the room with the sisters, and Virginia apologized for not having been more cautious than to lead to such subjects. 'It is all gossip,' she said, angrily ; 'Mr. Dynevor would never marry for money.'

'Nay, let us find in her an Adeline,' said Isabel.

The next day, Miss Mercy had hurried into No. 7, to declare that the ladies were all that was charming, but that their servants gave themselves airs beyond credence, especially the butler, who played the guitar, and insisted on a second table ; when there was a peal of the bell, and Mary from her post of observation 'really believed it was Lady Conway herself ;' whereupon Miss Mercy, without listening to persuasions, popped into the back drawing-room to effect her retreat.

Lady Conway was all eagerness and cordiality, enchanted to renew her acquaintance, venturing so early a call in hopes of prevailing on Mrs. Ponsonby to come out with her to take a drive. She conjured up recollections of Mary's childhood, declared that she looked to her for drawing Isabel out, and was extremely kind and agreeable. Mary thought her delightful, with something of Louis's charm of manner ; and Mrs. Ponsonby believed it no acting, for Lady Conway was sincerely affable and affectionate, with great warmth and kindness, and might have been all that was excellent, had she started into life with a different code of duty.

So there was to be an intimacy. For Fitzjocelyn's sake, as well as for the real good-nature of the advances, Mrs. Ponsonby would not shrink back more than befitted her self-respect. Of that quality she had less than Mrs. Frost, who, with her innate punctilious spirit, avoided all favours or patronage. It was curious to see the gentle old lady fire up with all the dignity of the Pendragons, at the least peril of incurring an obligation ;

and, though perfectly courteous, easy, and obliging, she contrived to keep at a greater distance than if she had been mistress of Cheveleigh. There, she would have remembered that both she and Lady Conway were aunts to Louis ; at Northwold, her care was to become beholden for nothing that she could not repay.

Lady Conway did her best, when driving out with Mrs. Ponsonby, to draw her into confidence. There were tender reminiscences from her heart of poor sweet Louisa, tearful inquiries respecting her last weeks, certainties that Mrs. Ponsonby had been of great use to her ; for, poor darling, she had been thoughtless—so much to turn her head. There was cause for regret in their own education—there was then so much less attention to essentials. Lady Conway could not have borne to bring up her own girls as she herself and her sisters had grown up ; she had chosen a governess who made religion the first object, and she was delighted to see them all so attached to her ; she had never had any fears of their being too serious—people had learnt to be reasonable now, did not insist on the impracticable, did not denounce moderate gaieties, as had once been done to the alarm of poor Louisa.

Sweetest Louisa's son ! She could not speak too warmly of him, and she declared herself highly gratified by Mr. Mansell's opinion of his modesty, attention, and good sense. Mr. Mansell was an excellent judge, he had such an opinion of Lord Ormersfield's public character.

And, at a safe interval, she mentioned the probability that Beauchastel might be settled on Isabel, if she should marry so as to please Mr. Mansell : he cared for connection more than for wealth ; if he had a weakness, it was for rank.

Mrs. Ponsonby thought it fair that the Earl should be aware of these facts. He smiled ironically.

He left his card with his sister-in-law, and, to have it over while Louis was safe at Oxford, invited the party to spend a day at Ormersfield, with Mrs. Frost to entertain them. He was far too considerate of the feelings that he attributed to the Ponsonbys to ask them to come ; and as three out of the six in company were more or less in a state of haughtiness and coolness, Lady Conway's graces failed entirely ; and poor innocent Virginia and Louisa protested that they had never spent so dull a day, and that they could not believe their cousin Fitzjocelyn could belong to such a tiresome place.

Isabel, who had undergone more dull days than they had, contrived to get through it by torturing Adeline with utter silence of all tidings from the East, and by a swarm of suitors, with the fantastic Viscount foremost. She never was awake from her dream until Mr. Holdsworth came to dinner, and was so straightforward and easy that he thawed every one.

Afterwards, he never failed to return an enthusiastic reply to the question that all the neighbourhood were asking each other—namely, whether they had seen Miss Conway.

No one was a more devoted admirer than the Lady of Eschalott, whose webs had a bad chance when there was one glimpse of Miss Conway to be obtained from the window, and the vision of whose heart was that Mrs. Martha might some day let her stand in the housemaid's closet, to behold her idol issue forth in the full glory of an evening dress—a thing Charlotte had read of, but never seen anything nearer to it than Miss Walby coming to tea, and her own Miss Clara in the scantiest of all white muslins.

But Mrs. Martha was in an unexampled state of vixenish crossness, and snapped venomously at mild Mrs. Beckett for the kindest offers of sparing Charlotte to assist her in her multiplied labours. She seemed to be running after time all day long, with five dinners and teas upon her hands, poor woman, and allowing herself not the slightest relaxation, except to rush in for a few seconds to No. 7, to indulge herself by inveighing against the whole of the fine servants; and yet she was so proud of having lodgers at all, that she hated them for nothing so much as for threatening to go away.

The object of her bitterest invectives was the fastidious butler, Mr. Delaford, who by her account could do nothing for himself, grudged her mistresses their very sitting-room, drank wine with the ladies' maids like a gentleman, and ordered fish for the second table; talked of having quitted a duke, and submitting to live with Lady Conway because he compassionated unprotected females, and my lady was dependent on him for the care of Sir Walter in the holidays. To crown his offences, he never cleaned his own plate, but drew sketches and played the guitar! Moreover, Mrs. Martha had her notions that he was making that sickly Frenchified maid of Miss Conway's much too fond of him; and as to his calling himself Mr. Delaford—why, Mrs. Martha had a shrewd suspicion that he was some kin to her first cousin's brother-in-law's shopman's wife in Tottenham-court-road, whose name she knew was Ford, and who had been picked out of a gutter! The establishment of such a fact appeared as if it would be the triumph of Mrs. Martha's life. In the meantime, she more than hinted that she would wear herself to the bone rather than let Charlotte Arnold into the house; and Jane, generally assenting, though seldom going all lengths, used to divert the conversation by comparisons with Mr. Frampton's politeness and consideration. He never came to No. 5 to give trouble, only to help.

The invectives produced on Charlotte's mind an effect the reverse of what was intended. Mr. Delaford, a finer gentleman than Mr. Frampton and Mr. Poynings, must be a wonder of nature. The guitar—redolent of serenades and Spanish cloaks—oh! but once to see and hear it! The very rudeness of Mrs. Martha's words, so often repeated, gave her a feeling in favour of their object. She had known Mrs. Martha unjust before. Poor Tom! if he had only been a Spaniard, he would have sung about the white dove—his pretty thought—in a

serenade ; but then he might have poniarded Mr. James in his passion, which would have been less agreeable—she supposed he had forgotten her long ago—and so much the better !

It was a Sunday evening. Every one was gone to church except Charlotte, who was left to keep house. Though November, it was not cold ; the day had been warm and showery, and the full moon had risen in the most glorious brightness, riding in a sky the blue of which looked almost black by contrast with her brilliancy. Charlotte stood at the back door, gazing at the moon walking in brightness, and wandered into the garden, to enjoy what to her was beyond all other delights, reading Gessner's *Death of Abel* by moonlight. There was quite sufficient light, even if she had not known the idyll almost by heart ; and in a trance of dreamy, undefined delight, she stood beside the dark ivy-covered wall, each leaf glistening in the moonbeams, which shed a subdued pearliness over her white apron and collar, paled but gave a shadowy refinement to her features, and imparted a peculiar soft golden gloss to the fair braids of hair on her modest brow.

A sound of opening the back gate made her give one of her violent starts ; but before she could spring into the shelter of the house, she was checked by the civil words, 'I beg your pardon, I was mistaken—I took this for No. 8.'

'Three doors off—' began Charlotte, discovering, with a shy thrill of surprise and pleasure, that she had been actually accosted by the great Mr. Delaford ; and the moonlight, quite as becoming to him as to her, made him an absolute Italian count, tall, dark, pale, and whiskered. He did not go away at once ; he lingered, and said softly, 'I perceive that you partake my own predilection for the moonlight hour.'

Charlotte would have been delighted, had it not been a great deal harder to find an answer than if the old lord had asked her a question ; but she simpered and blushed, which probably did just as well.

Mr. Delaford supposed she knew the poet's lines—

'How sweet the moonlight sleeps on yonder bank—'

'Oh yes, sir—so sweet !' exclaimed the Lady of Eschalott, under her breath, though yonder bank was only represented by the chequer-work of Mrs. Ponsonby's latticed trellis ; and Mr. Delaford proceeded to quote the whole passage, in a deep mellow voice, but with a great deal of affectation ; and Charlotte gasped, 'So beautiful !'

'I perceive that you have a fine taste for poetry,' said Mr. Delaford, so graciously, that Charlotte presumed to say, 'Oh, sir ! is it true that you can play the guitar ?'

He smiled upon her tone of veneration, and replied, 'A trifle—a little instrumental melody was a great resource. If his poor performance would afford her any gratification, he would fetch his guitar.'

'Oh, sir—thank you—a psalm-tune, perhaps. It is Sunday—if you would be so kind.'

He smiled superciliously as he regretted that his music was not of that description, and Charlotte felt ready to sink into the earth at the indignity she had done the guitar in forgetting that it could accompany anything but such songs as Valancourt sang to Emily. She begged his pardon humbly; and he declared that he had a great respect for a lady's scruples, and should be happy to meet her another evening. 'If Mrs. Beckett would allow her,' said Charlotte, overpowered with gratitude: 'there would be the moon full to-morrow—how delightful!' He could spare a short interval between the dinner and the tea; and with this promise he took leave.

Honest little Charlotte told Mrs. Beckett the whole story, and all her eager wishes for to-morrow evening; and Jane sighed and puzzled herself, and knew it would make Martha very angry, but could not help being good-natured. Jane had a great deference for Martha's strong, rough character; but then Martha had never lived in a great house, and did not know 'what was what,' nor the difference between 'low people' and upper servants. So Jane acted chaperon as far as her easy discretion went, and had it to say to her own conscience, and to the angry Martha, that he never said one word that need offend any young woman.

There was a terrible storm below-stairs in the House Beautiful at the idea of Delaford taking up with Mrs. Frost's little kitchen-maid—Delaford, the lady's-maid killer *par excellence*, wherever Lady Conway went, and whose coquetries whitened the cheeks of Miss Conway's poor Marianne, the object of his attentions whenever he had no one else in view. He had not known Charlotte to be a kitchen-maid when he first beheld her, and her fair beauty and retiring grace had had full scope, assisted by her veneration for himself; and now the scorn of the grand Mrs. Fanshawe, and the amusement of teasing Marianne, only made him the more bent on patronizing the 'little rustic,' as he called her. He was deferential to Mrs. Beckett, who felt herself in her element in discussing plate, china, and large establishments with him; and he lent books, talked poetry, and played the guitar to Charlotte, and even began to take her portrait, with her mouth all on one side.

Delaford was an admirable servant, said the whole Conway family; he was trusted as entirely as he represented, and Lady Conway often gave him charge over her son in sports and expeditions beyond ladies' management: he was, in effect, nearly the ruler of the household, and never allowed his lady to go anywhere if he did not approve. If it had not been for the 'little rustic's' attractions, perhaps he might have made strong demonstrations against the House Beautiful. Little did Miss Faithfull know the real cause of her receiving or retaining her lodgers.

CHAPTER XV

MOTLEY THE ONLY WEAR

For better far than passion's glow,
 Or aught of worldly choice,
 To listen His own will to know,
 And, listening, hear His voice.

The Angel of Marriage—REV. I. WILLIAMS

THE friendships that grew up out of sight were far more effective than anything that Lady Conway could accomplish on the stage. Miss King and the Miss Faithfulls found each other out at once, and the governess was entreated to knock at the door at the bottom of the stairs whenever her pupils could spare her.

Then came eager wishes from her pupils, to be admitted to the snugger, and they were invited to see the curiosities. Isabel believed the 'very good' was found, and came with her sisters. She begged to be allowed to help in their parish work, under Miss Mercy Faithfull's guidance; and Sir Roland stood still, while she fancied she was learning to make little frocks, but really listening to their revelations of so new a world. She went out with Miss Mercy—she undertook a class and a district, and began to be happier than ever before; though how much of the absolute harder toil devolved on Miss King, neither she nor the governess understood.

This led to intercourse with Mary Ponsonby; and Isabel was a very different person in that homely, friendly parlour, from the lofty, frigid Miss Conway of the drawing-room. Cold *hauteur* melted before Mary's frank simplicity, and they became friends as fast as two ladies could beyond the age of romantic plunges, where on one side there was good-will without enthusiasm, on the other enthusiasm and reserve. They called each other 'Miss Conway' and 'Miss Ponsonby,' and exchanged no family secrets; but they were, for all that, faster friends than young ladies under twenty might imagine.

One winter's day, the crisp, exhilarating frost had lured them far along the high road beyond Mr. Calcott's park palings, talking over Isabel's favourite theme, what to wish for her little brother, when the sound of a large clock striking three made Isabel ask where she was.

'It was the stable clock at Ormersfield,' said Mary; 'did you not know we were on that road?'

'No, I did not.' And Isabel would have turned, but Mary begged her to take a few steps up the lane, that they might see how Lord Fitzjocelyn's new cottages looked. Isabel complied, and added, after a pause, 'Are you one of Lord Fitzjocelyn's worshippers?'

'I should not like to worship any one,' said Mary, looking

straightforward. 'I am very fond of him, because I have known him all my life. And he is so good!'

'Then I think I may consider you exempt! It is the only fault I have to find with Northwold. You are the only person who does not rave about him—the only person who has not mentioned his name.'

'Have I not? I think that was very unkind of me—'

'Very kind to me,' said Isabel.

'I meant, to him,' said Mary, blushing; 'if you thought that I did not think most highly of him—'

'Don't go on! I was just going to trust to you for a calm, dispassionate statement of his merits, and I shall soon lose all my faith in you.'

'My mother—' began Mary; but just then Lord Ormersfield came forth from one of the cottages, and encountered the young ladies. He explained that Fitzjocelyn was coming home next week, and he had come to see how his last orders had been executed, since Frampton and the carpenter had sometimes chosen to think for themselves. He was very anxious that all should be right, and, after a few words, revealed a perplexity about ovens and boilers, in which Mary's counsel would be invaluable. So, with apologies and ceremonies to Miss Conway, they entered, and Isabel stood waiting in the dull kitchen, smelling of raw plaster, wondering at the extreme eagerness of the discussion with the mason over the yawning boiler, the Earl referring to his son's letter, holding it half a yard off, and at last giving it to Mary to decipher by the waning light.

So far had it waned, that when the fixtures had all been inspected, Lord Ormersfield declared that the young ladies must not return alone, and insisted on escorting them home. Every five minutes some one thought of something to say: there was an answer, and by good luck a rejoinder; then all died away, and Mary pondered how her mother would in her place have done something to draw the two together, but she *could* not. She feared the walk had made Isabel more adverse to all connected with Ormersfield than even previously; for the Ormersfield road was avoided, and the question as to Fitzjocelyn's merits was never renewed.

Mary thought his cause would be safest in the hands of his great champion, who was coming home from Oxford with him, and was to occupy his vacation in acting tutor to little Sir Walter Conway. Louis came, the day after his return, with his father, to make visits in the Terrace, and was as well-behaved and uninteresting as morning calling could make him. He was looking very well—his general health quite restored, and his ankle much better; though he was still forbidden to ride, and could not walk far.

'You must come and see me, Aunt Kitty,' he said; 'I am not available for coming in to see you. I'm reading, and I've made a resignation of myself,' he added, with a slight blush, and

debonnaire shrug, glancing to see that his father was occupied with James.

They were to dine with Lady Conway on the following Tuesday. In the interim, no one beheld them except Jem, who walked to Ormersfield once or twice for some skating for his little pupil Walter, and came back reporting that Louis had sold himself, body and soul, to his father.

Clara came home, a degree more civilized, and burning to confide to Louis that she had thought of his advice, had been the less miserable for it, and had much more on which to consult him. She could not conceive why even grandmamma would not consent to her accompanying the skaters; though she was giving herself credit for protesting that she was not going on the ice, only to keep poor Louis company, while the others were skating.

She was obliged to defer her hopes of seeing him until Tuesday, when she had been asked to drink tea in the school-room, and appear in the evening. Mrs. Frost had consented, as a means of exempting herself from the party. And Clara's incipient feminine nature began to flutter at her first gaiety. The event was magnified by a present from Jem, of a broad rose-coloured sash and white muslin dress, with a caution that she was not to consider the tucks up to the waist as a provision for future growth.

She flew to exhibit the finery to the Miss Faithfulls, and to consult on the making-up, and, to her consternation, was caught by Miss Conway kneeling on the floor, being measured by Miss Salome. To Isabel, there was a sort of touching novelty in the simplicity that could glory in pink ribbon when embellished by being a brother's gift; she looked on with calm pleasure at such homely excitement, and even fetched some bows of her own, for examples, and offered to send Marianne down with patterns.

Clara was enchanted to recognize in Miss Conway the vision of the Euston-square platform. The grand, quiet style of beauty was exactly fitted to impress a mind like hers, so strongly imbued with sentiments like those of Louis, and regarding Isabel as necessarily Louis's destiny, she began to adore her accordingly with a girl-reverence, quite as profound, far more unselfish, and little less ardent than that of man for woman. That a female vision of perfection should engross Clara's imagination, was a step towards softening her; but, poor child! the dawn of womanhood was to come in a painful burst.

Surprised at her own aspect, with her light hair dressed by Jane and wreathed with ivy leaves by grandmamma, and her skirts so full that she could not refrain from making a gigantic cheese, she was inspected and admired by granny and Jane, almost approved by Jem himself; and, exalted by the consciousness of being well-dressed, she repaired to the schoolroom tea at the House Beautiful.

Virginia and Louisa were, she thought, very poor imitations of Louis's countenance—the one too round, the other too thin

and sallow ; but both they, their brother, and Miss King were so utterly unlike anything at school, that she was at once at ease, and began talking with Walter over schoolboy fun, in which he could not be a greater proficient than herself. Walter struck up a violent friendship for her on the spot, and took to calling her 'a fellow,' in oblivion of her sex ; and Virginia and Louisa fell into ecstasies of laughter, which encouraged Clara and Walter to compete with each other which should most astonish their weak minds.

In the drawing-room, Lady Conway spoke so graciously, that Clara was quite distressed at looking over her head. Mary looked somewhat oppressed, saying her mother had not been so well that day ; and she was disposed to keep in the background, and occupy herself with Clara ; but it was quite contrary to the Giraffe's notions to be engrossed by any one when Louis was coming. As if she had divined Mary's intentions of keeping her from importuning him, she was continually gazing at the door, ready at once to claim his attention.

At first, the gentlemen only appeared in a black herd at the door, where Mr. Calcott had stopped Lord Ormersfield short, in his eagerness to impress on him the views of the county on a police-bill in course of preparation for the next session. The other magistrates congregated round ; but James Frost and Sydney Calcott had slipped past, to the piano where Lady Conway had sent Miss Calcott and Isabel. 'Why did not Fitzjocelyn come too ?' was murmured by the young group in the recess opposite the door ; and when at last he became visible, leaning against the wall, listening to the Squire, Virginia declared he was going to serve them just as he used at Beauchastel.

'Oh, no ! he shan't—I'll rescue him !' exclaimed Clara ; and leaping up to her camelopard altitude, she sprang forward, and, with a voice audible in an unlucky lull of the music, she exclaimed, 'Louis ! Louis ! don't you see that I am here ?'

As he turned, with a look of surprise and almost rebuke, her own words came back to her ears as they must have sounded to others ; her face became poppy-coloured, nothing light but her flaxen eyebrows ; and she scarcely gave her hand to be shaken. 'No, I did not know you were coming,' he said ; and almost partaking her confusion, as he felt all eyes upon her, he looked in vain for a refuge for her.

How welcome was Mary's kind face and quiet gesture, covering poor Clara's retreat as she sank into a dark nook, sheltered by the old black cabinet ! Louis thanked Mary by a look, as much as to say, 'Just like you,' and was glad to perceive that James had not been present. He had gone to ask Miss Faithfull to supply the missing stanzas of a Jacobite song, and just then returned, saying that she knew them, but could not remember them.

Fitzjocelyn, however, capped the fragment, and illustrated it with some anecdotes that interested Miss Conway. James had

great hopes that she was going to see him to the best advantage, but still there was a great drawback in the presence of Sydney Calcott. Idolized at home, successful abroad, young Calcott had enough of the prig to be a perpetual irritation to Jem Frost, all the more because he could never make Louis resent, nor accept, as other than natural, the good-natured supercilious patronage of the steady distinguished senior towards the idle junior.

Jacobite legends and Stuart relics would have made Miss Conway oblivious of everything else ; but Sydney Calcott must needs divert the conversation from that channel by saying, 'Ah ! there Fitzjocelyn is in his element. He is a perfect handbook to the by-ways of history.'

'For the diffusion of useless knowledge ?' said Louis.

'Illustrated by the examination, when the only fact you could adduce about the Argonauts was that Charles V. founded the order of the Golden Fleece.'

'I beg your pardon ; it was his great-grandfather. I had read my *Quentin Durward* too well for that.'

'I suspect,' said Isabel, 'that we had all rather be examined in our *Quentin Durward* than our *Charles V.*'

'Ah !' said young Calcott, 'I had all my dates at my fingers' ends when I went up for the modern history prize. Now my sister could beat me.'

'A proof of what I always say,' observed Louis, 'that it is lost labour to read for an examination.'

'From personal experience ?' asked Sydney.

'A Strasburg goose nailed down and crammed before a fire, becomes a Strasburg pie,' said Louis.

Never did Isabel look more bewildered, and Sydney did not seem at once to catch the meaning. James added, 'A goose destined to fulfil the term of existence is not crammed, but the pie stimulus is not required to prevent it from starving.'

'Is your curious and complimentary culinary fable aimed against reading or against examinations ?' asked Sydney.

'Against neither ; only against the connecting preposition.'

'Then you mean to find a superhuman set of students ?'

'No ; I'm past that. Men and examinations will go on as they are ; the goose will run wild, the requirements will be increased, he will nail himself down in his despair ; and he who crams hardest, and has the hottest place, will gain.'

'Then how is the labour lost ?' asked Isabel.

'You are new to Fitzjocelyn's paradoxes,' said Sydney, as if glorying in having made Louis contradict himself.

'The question is, what is lost labour ?' said Louis.

Both Sydney Calcott and Miss Conway looked as if they thought he was arguing on after a defeat. 'Calcott is teaching her his own obtuseness !' thought James, in a pet ; and he exclaimed, 'Is the aim to make men or winners of prizes ?'

'The aim of prizes is commonly supposed to be to make men,' loftily observed Sydney.

'Exactly so ; and, therefore, I would not make them too analogous to the Strasburg system,' said Louis. 'I would have them close, searching, but not admitting of immediate cramming.'

'Pray how would you bring that about?'

'By having no subject on which superficial knowledge could make a show.'

'Oh ! I see whither you are working round ! That won't do now, my dear fellow ; we must enlarge our field, or we shall lay ourselves open to the charge of being narrow-minded.'

'You have not strength of mind to be narrow-minded !' said Louis, shaking his head. 'Ah ! well, I have no more to say ; my trust is in the narrow mind, the only expansive one—'

He was at that moment called away ; Lord Ormersfield's carriage had been announced, and his son was not in a quarter of the room where he wished to detain him. James could willingly have bitten Sydney Calcott for the observation, 'Poor Fitzjocelyn ! he came out strong to-night.'

'Very clever,' said Isabel, wishing to gratify James.

'Oh, yes, very ; if he had ever taken pains,' said Sydney. 'There is often something in his paradoxes. After all, I believe he *is* reading hard for his degree, is he not, Jem ? His feelings would not be hurt by the question, for he never piqued himself upon his consistency.'

Luckily for the general peace, the Calcott household was on the move, and Jem solaced himself on their departure by exclaiming, 'Well done, Strasburg system ! A high-power Greek-imbibing machine, he may be ; but as to comprehending Fitzjocelyn—'

'Nay,' said Isabel, 'I think Lord Fitzjocelyn ought to carry about a pocket expositor, if he will be so very startling. He did not stay to tell us what to understand by narrow minds.'

'Did you ever hear of any one good for anything, that was not accused of a narrow mind ?' exclaimed James.

'If that were what he meant,' said Isabel ;—'but he said his trust was in the narrow mind—'

'In what is popularly so called,' said James.

'I think,' said Mary, leaning forward, and speaking low, 'that he did not mean it to be explained away. I think he was going to say that the heart may be wide, but the mind must be so far narrow, that it will accept only the one right, not the many wrong.'

'I thought narrowness of mind consisted in thinking your own way the only right one,' said Isabel.

'Every one says so,' said Mary ; 'and that is why he says it takes strength of mind to be narrow-minded. Is not the real evil, the judging people harshly, because their ways are not the same ; not the being sure that the one way is the only right ! Others may be better than ourselves, and may be led right in spite of their error, but surely we are not to think all paths alike—'

'And is that Lord Fitzjocelyn's definition of a narrow mind?' said Isabel. 'It sounds like faith and love. Are you sure you did not make it yourself, Miss Ponsonby?'

'I *could* not,' said Mary, blushing, as she remembered one Sunday evening when he had said something to that effect, which had insensibly overthrown the theory in which she had been bred up; namely, that all the sincere were right, and yet that, practically, every one was to be censured, who did not act exactly like Aunt Melicent.

She rose to take leave, and Clara clung to her, emerging from the shade of her cabinet with colour little mitigated since her disappearance. James would have come with them, but was detained by Lady Conway for a few moments longer than it took them to put on their shawls; and Clara would not wait. She dragged Mary down the steps into the darkness, and groaned out, 'O Mary, he can never speak to me again!'

'My dear, he will not recollect it. It was very awkward, but new places and new people often do make us forget ourselves.'

'Everybody saw, everybody heard! O, I shall never bear to meet one of them again!'

'I think very few saw or heard—' began Mary.

'He did! I did! That's enough! The rest is nothing! I have been as bad as any one at school! I shall never hold up my head there again as I have done; and Louis! Oh!'

'Dear child, it will not be remembered. You only forgot how tall you were, and that you were not at home. He knows you too well to care.'

James shouted from behind to know why they had not been let into the house; and as Clara rushed in at the door and he walked on with Mary to leave her at home and fetch his grandmother, who had been spending the evening with Mrs. Ponsonby, he muttered, 'I don't know which is most intolerable! He neglects her, talks what, if it be not nonsense, might as well be; and as if she were not ready enough to misunderstand, Sydney Calcott must needs thrust in his wits to embroil her understanding. Mary! can't you get her to see the stuff he is made of?'

'If she cannot do that for herself, no persuasion of mine will make her,' said Mary.'

'No! you do not half appreciate him either! No one does! And yet you could, if you tried, do something with her! I see she does not think you prejudiced. You made an impression to-night.'

Mary felt some consternation. Could it depend on her? She could speak naturally and from her heart in defence of Louis when occasion served; but something within her forbade the thought of doing so on a system. Was that *something* wrong? She could not answer; but contented herself with the womanly intuition that showed her that anything of persuasion

in the present state of affairs would be ineffectual and unbecoming.

Meantime, Clara had fled to her little room, to bid her childhood farewell in a flood of bitter tears.

Exaggerated shame, past disdain of the foibles of others, the fancy that she was publicly disgraced and had forfeited Louis's good opinion, each thought renewed her sobs ; but the true pang was the perception that old times were passed for ever. He might forgive, he would still be friend and cousin ; but womanhood had broken on her, and showed that perfect freedom was at an end. Happy for her that she wept but for the parting from a playfellow ! Happy that her feelings were young and undeveloped, free from all the cruel permanence that earlier vanity or self-consciousness might have given ; happy that it could be so freely washed away ! When she had spent her sobs, she could resolve to be wise and steady, so as to be a fit governess to his children ; and the tears flowed at the notion of being so distant and respectful to his lordship. But what stories she could tell them of his boyhood ! And in the midst of—'Now, my dears, I will tell you about your papa when he was a little boy,' she fell asleep.

That party was a thing to be remembered with tingling cheeks for life, and Clara dreaded her next meeting with Louis ; but the days passed on without his coming to the Terrace, and the terror began to wear off, especially as she did not find that any one else remembered her outbreak. Mary guarded against any unfavourable impression by a few simple words to Isabel and Miss King as to the brotherly terms that had hitherto prevailed, and poor Clara's subsequent distress. Clara came in for some of the bright tints in which her brother was viewed at the House Beautiful ; Walter was very fond of her, and she had been drawn into a friendship for Virginia, cemented in the course of long walks ; when the schoolroom party always begged for Mr. and Miss Dynevor, because no one else could keep Walter from disturbing Louisa's nerves by teasing her pony or sliding on dubious ice.

As Mrs. Ponsonby often joined in Lady Conway's drive, Mary and Isabel were generally among the walkers ; and Mary was considered by Louisa as an inestimable pony-leader, and an inexhaustible magazine of stories about sharks, earthquakes, llamas, and icebergs.

James and Miss Conway generally had either book or principle to discuss, and were usually to be found somewhat in the rear, either with or without Miss King. One day, however, James gave notice that he should not be at their service that afternoon ; and as soon as Walter's lessons had been despatched, he set out with rapid steps for Ormersfield Park, clenching his teeth together every now and then, with his determinate resolution that he would make Louis know his own mind, and would stand 'no nonsense.'

'Ah! James, good morning,' said the Earl, as he presented himself in the study. 'You will find Louis in his room. I wish you would make him come out with you. He is working harder than is good for him.'

He spoke of his son far differently from former times; but Jem only returned a judiciously intoned 'Poor fellow.'

Lord Ormersfield looked at him anxiously, and, hesitating, said, 'You do not think him out of spirits?'

'Oh, he carries it off very well. I know no one with so strong a sense of duty,' replied Jem, never compassionate to the father.

Again the Earl paused, then said, 'He may probably speak more unreservedly to you than to me.'

'He shuns the topic. He says there is no use in aggravating the feelings by discussion. He would fain submit in heart as well as in will.'

Lord Ormersfield sighed, but did not appear disposed to say more; and, charitably hoping that a dagger had been implanted in him, Jem ran up-stairs, and found Louis sitting writing at a table which looked as if Mary had never been near it.

'Jem! That's right! I've not seen you this age.'

'What are you about?'

'I wanted particularly some one to listen. It is an essay on the Police—'

'Is this earnest?'

'Sober earnest. Sir Miles and all that set are anxious to bring the matter forward, and my father has been getting it up, as he does whatever he may have to speak upon. His eyes are rather failing for candle-light work, so I have been helping him in the evening, till it struck me that it was a curious subject to trace in history,—the Censors, the attempts in Germany and Spain to supply the defective law, the Spanish and Italian dread of justice. I became enamoured of the notion, and when I have thrown all the hints together, I shall try to take in my father by reading them to him as an article in the *Quarterly*.'

'Oh, very well. If your soul is there, that is an end of the matter.'

'Of what matter?'

'Things cannot run on in this way. It is not a thing to lay upon me to go on working in your cause with her when you will not stir a step in your own behalf.'

'I am very much obliged to you, but I never asked you to work in my cause. I beg your pardon, Jem, don't fly into a Welsh explosion. No one ever meant more kindly and generously—' He checked himself in amaze at the demonstration he had elicited; but, as it was not accompanied with words, he continued,—'No one can be more grateful to you than I; but, as far as I can see, there is nothing for it but to be thankful that no more harm has been done, and to let the matter drop; and he dropped his hand with just so much despondency as to make Jem think him worth storming at, instead of giving him

up; and he went over the whole ground of Louis being incapable of true passion, and unworthy of such a being, if he could yield her without an effort, merely for the sake of peace.

'I say, Jem,' said Louis, quietly, 'all this was bad enough on neutral ground; it is mere treason under my father's own roof, and I will have no more of it.'

'Then,' cried James, with a strange light in his eyes, 'you henceforth renounce all hopes—all pretensions?'

'I never had either hope or pretension. I do not cease to think her, as I always did, the loveliest creature I ever beheld. I cannot help that; and the state I fell into after being with her on Tuesday, convinced me that it is safest to stay here, and fill up time and thought as best I may.'

'For once, Fitzjocelyn,' said James, with a gravity not natural to him, 'I think better of your father than you do. I would neither treat him as so tyrannical nor so prejudiced as your conduct supposes him.'

'How? He is as kind as possible. We never had so much in common.'

'Yes. Your submission so far, and the united testimony of the Terrace, will soften him. Show your true sentiments. A little steadiness and perseverance, and you will prevail.'

'Don't make me feverish, Jem.'

A summons to Lord Fitzjocelyn to come down to a visitor in the library cut short the discussion, and James took leave at once, neither cousin wishing to resume the conversation.

The darts had not been injudiciously aimed. The father and son were both rendered uneasy. They had hitherto been unusually comfortable together, and though the life was unexciting, Louis's desire to be useful to his father, and the pressing need of working for his degree, kept his mind fairly occupied. Though wistful looks might sometimes be turned along the Northwold road, when he sallied forth in the twilight for his constitutional walk, he did not analyze which number of the Terrace was the magnet, and he avoided testing to the utmost the powers of his foot. The affection and solicitude shown for him at home claimed a full return; nor had James been greatly mistaken in ascribing something to the facility of nature that yielded to force of character. But Jem had stirred up much that Louis would have been contented to leave dormant; and the hope that he had striven to excite came almost teasingly to interfere with the passive acquiescence of an indolent will. Perturbed and doubtful, he was going to seek counsel as usual of the open air, as soon as the visitor was gone, but his father followed him into the hall, asking whither he was going.

'I do not know. I had been thinking of trying whether I can get as far as Marksedge.'

Marksedge would be fatal to the ankle, solitude to the spirits, thought the Earl; and he at once declared his intention of walking with his son as far as he should let him go.

Louis was half vexed, half flattered, and they proceeded in silence, till conscious of being ruffled, and afraid of being ungracious, he made a remark on the farm that they were approaching, and learnt in return that the lease was nearly out, the tenant did not want a renewal, and that Richardson intended to advertise.

He breathed a wish that it were in their own hands, and this led to a statement of the condition of affairs, the same to which a year before he had been wilfully deaf, and to which he now attended chiefly for the sake of gratifying his father, though he better understood what depended on it. At least, it was making the Earl insensible to the space they were traversing, and the black outlines of Marksedge were rising on him before he was aware. Then he would have turned, but Louis pleaded that having come so far, he should be glad to speak to Madison's grandfather, and one or two other old people, and he prevailed.

Lord Ormersfield was not prepared for the real aspect of the hamlet.

'Richardson always declared that the cottages were kept in repair,' he said.

'Richardson never sees them. He trusts to Reeves.'

'The people might do something themselves to keep the place decent.'

'They might; but they lose heart out of sight of respectability. I will just knock at this door—I will not detain you a moment.'

The dark smoky room, damp, ill-paved floor, and cracked walls produced their effect; and the name and voice of the inmate did more. Lord Ormersfield recognized a man who had once worked in the garden, and came forward and spoke, astonished and shocked to find him prematurely old. The story was soon told; there had been a seasoning fever as a welcome to the half-reclaimed moorland; ague and typhus were frequent visitors, and disabling rheumatism a more permanent companion to labourers exhausted by long wet walks in addition to the daily toil. At an age less than that of the Earl himself, he beheld a bowed and broken cripple.

Fitzjocelyn perceived his victory, and forbore to press it too hastily, lest he should hurt his father's feelings; and walked on silently, thinking how glad Mary would be to hear of this expedition, and what a pity it was that the unlucky passage of last August should have interfered with their comfortable friendship. At last the Earl broke silence by saying, 'It is very unfortunate;' and Louis echoed, 'Very.'

'My poor Uncle Dynevor! He was, without exception, the most wrong-headed person I ever came in contact with, yet so excessively plausible and eager, that he carried my poor father entirely along with him. Louis! nothing is so ruinous as to surrender the judgment.'

Fully assenting, Louis wondered whether Marksedge would

serve no purpose save the elucidation of this truism, and presently another ensued.

'Mischief is sooner done than repaired. As I have been showing you, there has never been ready money at command.'

'I thought there were no more mortgages to be paid off. The rents of the Fitzjocelyn estate and the houses in the lower town must come to something.'

He was then told how these, with his mother's fortune, had been set apart to form a fund for his establishment, and for the first time he was shown the object of arrangements against which he had often in heart rebelled. His first impulse was to exclaim that it was a great pity, and that he could not bear that his father should have denied himself on his account.

'Do you think these things are sacrifices to me?' said the Earl. 'My habits were formed long ago.'

'Mine have been formed on yours,' said Louis. 'I should be encumbered by such an income as you propose, unless you would let me lay it out in making work for the men and improving the estate, and that I had rather you undertook, for I should be certain to do something preposterous, and then be sorry.'

'Mrs. Ponsonby judged rightly. It was her very advice.'

'Then!' cried Louis, as if the deed were done.

'You would not find the income too large in the event of your marriage.'

'A most unlikely event!'

His father glanced towards him. If there had been a symptom of unhappiness, relenting was near, but it so chanced that Marksedge was reigning supreme, and he was chiefly concerned to set aside the supposition as an obstacle to his views. The same notion as James Frost's occurred to the Earl, that it could not be a tenacious character which could so easily set aside an attachment apparently so fervent, but the resignation was too much in accordance with his desires to render him otherwise than gratified, and he listened with complacency to Louis's plans. Nothing was fixed, but there was an understanding that all should have due consideration.

This settled, Louis's mind recurred to the hint which his father had thrown out, and he wondered whether it meant that the present compliance might be further stretched, but he thought it more likely to be merely a reference to ordinary contingencies. Things were far too comfortable between him and his father to be disturbed by discussion, and he might ultimately succeed better by submitting, and leaving facts and candour to remove prejudice.

To forget perplexity in the amusement of a mystification, he brought down his essay, concealing it ingeniously within a review flanked by blue-books, and, when Lord Ormersfield was taking out a pair of spectacles with the reluctance of a man not yet accustomed to them, he asked him if he would like to hear an article on the Police question.

At first the Earl showed signs of nodding, and said there was nothing to the purpose in all the historical curiosities at the outset, so that Louis, alarmed lest he should absolutely drop asleep, skipped all his favourite passages, and came at once to the results of the recent inquiries. The Earl was roused. Who could have learnt those facts? That was telling—well put, but how did he get hold of it. The very thing he had said himself—What Quarterly was it? Surely the Christmas number was not out. Hitherto Louis had kept his countenance and voice, but in an hiatus, where he was trying to extemporize, his father came to look over his shoulder to see what ailed the book, and, glancing upwards with a merry *debonnaire* face, he made a gesture as if convicted.

‘Do you mean that this is your own composition?’

‘I beg your pardon for the pious fraud!’

‘It is very good! Excellently done!’ said Lord Ormersfield. ‘There are redundancies—much to betray an unpractised hand—but—stay, let me hear the rest—’

Very differently did he listen now, broad awake, attacking the logic of every third sentence, or else double shooting it with some ponderous word, and shaking his head at Utopian views of crime to be dried up at the fountain head. Next, he must hear the beginning, and ruthlessly picked it to pieces, demolishing all the *Vehme Gericht* and *Santissima Hermandad* as irrelevant, and, when he had made Louis ashamed and vexed with the whole production, astonishing him by declaring that it would tell, and advising him to copy it out fair with these *little* alterations.

These *little* alterations would, as he was well aware, evaporate all the spirit, and though glad to have pleased his father, his perseverance quailed before the task; but he said no more than thank you. The next day, before he had settled to anything, Lord Ormersfield came to his room, saying, ‘You will be engaged with your more important studies for the next few hours. Can you spare the paper you read to me last night?’

‘I can spare it better than you can read it, I fear,’ said Louis, producing a mass of blotted MS. in all his varieties of penmanship, and feeling a sort of despair at the prospect of being brought to book on all his details.

His father carried it off, and they did not meet again till late in the day, when the first thing Louis heard was, ‘I thought it worth while to have another opinion on your manuscript before re-writing it. I tried to read it to Mrs. Ponsonby, but we were interrupted, and I left it with her.’

Presently after: ‘I have made an engagement for you. Lady Conway wishes that you should go to luncheon with her to-morrow. I believe she wants to consult you about some birthday celebration.’

Louis was much surprised, and somewhat entertained.

‘When will you have the carriage?’ pursued the Earl.

'Will not you come?'

'No, I am not wanted. In fact, I do not see how you can be required, but anything will serve as an excuse. In justice, however, I should add that our friends at the Terrace are disposed to think well of the younger part of the family.'

Except for the cold constraint of the tone, Louis could have thought much ground gained, but he was sure that his holiday would be damped by knowing that it was conceded at the cost of much distress and uneasiness.

Going to Northwold early enough for a call at No. 5, he was greeted by Mrs. Frost with, 'My dear! what have you been about? I never saw your father so much pleased in his life! He came in on purpose to tell me, and I thought it exceedingly kind. So you took him in completely. What an impudent rogue you always were!'

'I never meant it to go beyond the study. I was obliged to write it down in self-defence, that I might know what he was talking of.'

'I believe he expects you to be even with Sydney Calcott after all. It is really very clever. Where did you get all those funny stories?'

'What! you have gone and read it.'

'Ah, ha! Mrs. Ponsonby gave us a pretty little literary *soirée*. Don't be too proud, it was only ourselves, except that Mary brought in Miss Conway. Jem tried to read it, but after he had made that Spanish Society into "Hammer men dead," Mary got it away from him, and read through as if it had been in print.'

'What an infliction!'

'It is very disrespectful to think us so frivolous. We only wished all reviews were as entertaining.'

'It is too bad, when I only wanted to mystify my father.'

'It serves you right for playing tricks. What have you been doing to him, Louis? You will turn him into a doting father before long.'

'What have you done with Clara?'

'She goes every day to read Italian with Miss Conway, and the governess is so kind as to give her drawing lessons. She is learning far more than at school, and they are so kind! I should hardly know how to accept it, but Jem does not object; and he is really very useful there, spends a great deal of time on the boy, and is teaching the young ladies Latin.'

'They are leaving you lonely in the holidays! You ought to come to Ormersfield, your nephews would take better care of you.'

'Ah! I have my Marys. If I were only better satisfied about the dear old one. She is far less well than when she came.'

'Indeed? Is Mary uneasy?'

'She says nothing, but you know how her eye is always on her, and she never seems to have her out of her thoughts. I am afraid they are worried about Lima. From what Oliver says, I

fear Mr. Ponsonby goes on worse than ever without either his family or his appointment to be a restraint.'

'I hope they do not know all! Mary would not believe it, that is one comfort!'

'Ah, Louis! there are things that the heart will not believe, but which cut it deeply! However, if that could be any comfort to them, he wishes them to spare nothing here. He tells them they may live at the rate of five thousand pounds a year, poor dears. Indeed, he and Oliver are in such glory over their Equatorial steam navigation, that I expect next to hear of a crash.'

'You don't look as if it would be a very dreadful sound.'

'If it would only bring my poor Oliver back to me!'

'Yes—nothing would make Jem so civil to him as his coming floated in on a plank, wet through, with a little bundle in one hand and a parrot in the other.'

Mrs. Frost gave one of her tender laughs, and filled up the picture. Jane would open the door, Jane would know Master Oliver's black eyes in a moment—'No, no. I must see him first! If he once looked up I could not miss him, whatever colour he may have turned. I wonder whether he would know me!'

'Don't you know that you grow handsomer every year, Aunt Kitty?'

'Don't flatter, sir.'

'Well, I must go to my aunt.'

He tarried to hear the welcome recital of all the kind deeds of the house of Conway. He presently found Lady Conway awaiting him in the drawing-room, and was greeted with great joy. 'That is well! I hoped to work on your father by telling him I did not approve of young men carrying industry too far—'

'That is not my habit.'

'Then it is your excuse for avoiding troublesome relations! No, not a word! I know nothing about the secret that occupied Isabel at Mrs. Ponsonby's select party. But I really wanted you. You are more *au fait* as to the society here than the Ponsonbys and Dynevors. Ah! when does that come off?'

'What is to come off?'

'Miss Ponsonby and Mr. Dynevor. What a good creature he is!'

'I cannot see much likelihood of it, but you are more on the scene of action.'

'She could do much better, with such expectations, but on his account I could not be sorry. It is shocking to think of that nice young sister being a governess. I think it a duty to give her every advantage that may tend to form her. With her connections and education, I can have no objection to her as a companion to your cousins, and with a few advantages, though she will never be handsome, she might marry well. They are a most interesting family. Isabel and I are most anxious to do all in our power for them.'

'Clara is obliged,' said Louis, with undetected irony, but secret wonder at the dexterity with which the patronage must have been administered so as not to have made the interesting family fly off at a tangent.

Isabel made her appearance in her almost constant morning dress of soft dove-coloured merino entirely unadorned, and looking more like a maiden in a romance than ever. She had just left Adeline standing on the steps of a stone cross, exhorting the Provençals to arm against a descent of Moorish corsairs, and she held out her hand to Fitzjocelyn much as Adeline did, when the fantastic Viscount professed his intention of flying instead of fighting, and wanted her to sit behind him on his courser.

Lady Conway pronounced her counsel complete, and pronounced the fête which she wished to give on the 12th of January in honour of Louisa's birthday. Isabel took up a pencil, and was lost in sketching way-side crosses, and vessels with lateen sails, only throwing in a word or two here and there when necessary. Dancing was still, Lady Conway feared, out of the question with Fitzjocelyn.

'And always will be, I suspect. So much for my bargain with Clara to dance with her at her first ball!'

'You like dancing?' exclaimed Isabel, rejoiced to find another resemblance to the fantastic Viscount.

'Last year's Yeomanry ball was the best fun in the world!'

'There, Isabel,' said Lady Conway 'you ought to be gratified to find a young man candid enough to allow that he likes it! But since that cannot be, I must find some other plan—'

'What cannot be?' exclaimed Louis. 'You don't mean to omit the dancing—'

'It could not be enjoyed without you. Your cousins and friends could not bear to see you sitting down—'

Isabel's lips were compressed, and the foam of her waves laughed scornfully under her pencil.

'They must get accustomed to the melancholy spectacle,' said Louis. 'I do not mean to intermit the Yeomanry ball, if it take place while I am at home. The chaperons are the best company, after all. Reconsider it, my dear aunt, or you will keep me from coming at all.'

Lady Conway was only considering of *tableaux*, and Louis took fire at the notion: he already beheld Waverley in his beloved Yeomanry suit, Isabel as Flora, Clara as Davie Gellatley—the character she would most appreciate. Isabel roused herself to say that *tableaux* were very dull work to all save the actors, and soon were mere weariness to them. Her step-mother told her she had once been of a different mind, when she had been Isabel Bruce, kneeling in her cell, the ring before her. 'I was young enough then to think myself Isabel,' was her answer; and she drew the more diligently because Fitzjocelyn could not restrain an interjection, and a look which meant, 'What an Isabel she must have been!'

She sat passive while Lady Conway and Louis decked up a scene for Flora MacIvor ; but presently it appeared that the Waverley of the piece was to be, according to Louis, not the proper owner of the Yeomanry uniform, but James Frost. His aunt exclaimed, and the rehearsals were strong temptation ; but he made answer, 'No—you must not reckon on me : my father would not like it !'

The manful childishness, the childish manfulness of such a reply, were impenetrable. If his two-and-twenty years did not make him ashamed of saying so, nothing else could, and it covered a good deal. He knew that his father's fastidious pride would dislike his making a spectacle of himself, and thought that it would be presuming unkindly on to-day's liberty to involve himself in what would necessitate terms more intimate than were desired.

The luncheon silenced the consultation, which was to be a great secret from the children ; but afterwards, when it was resumed, with the addition of James Frost, Fitzjocelyn was vexed to find the *tableaux* discarded ; not avowedly because he excluded himself from a share, but because the style of people might not understand them. The entertainment was to be a Christmas-tree—not so hackneyed a spectacle in the year 1848 as in 1857—and Louis launched into a world of couplets for mottoes. Next came the question of guests, when Lady Conway read out names from the card-basket, and Fitzjocelyn was in favour of everybody, till Jem, after many counter-statements, assured Lady Conway that he was trying to fill her rooms with the most intolerable people in the world.

'My aunt said she wanted to give pleasure.'

'Ah ! there's nothing so inconvenient to one's friends as good-nature. Who cares for what is shared indiscriminately ?'

'I don't think I can trust Fitzjocelyn with my visiting-list just yet,' said Lady Conway. 'You are too far above to be sensible of the grades beneath, with your place made for you.'

'Not at all,' said Louis. 'Northwold tea-parties were my earliest, most natural dissipation ; and I spoke for these good people for my own personal gratification.'

'Nay, I can't consent to your deluding Lady Conway into Mrs. Walby.'

'If there be any one you wish me to ask, my dear Fitzjocelyn—' began Lady Conway.

'Oh, no, thank you ; Jem is quite right. I might have been playing on your unguarded innocence ; but I am the worst person in the world to consult ; for all the county and all the town are so kind to me, that I don't know whom I could leave out. Now, the Pendragon there will help you to the degree of gentility that may safely be set to consort together.'

'What an unkind thing !' thought Isabel.

Louis took leave, exclaiming to himself on the stairs, 'There ! if comporting oneself like a donkey before the object be a token,

I've done it effectually. Didn't I know the exclusiveness of the woman? Yet, how could I help saying a word for the poor little Walbys? and, after all, if they were there, no one would speak to them but Aunt Kitty and me. And Isabel, I am sure she scorned the fastidious nonsense; I saw it in her eye and lip.'

After a quarter of an hour spent in hearing her praises from Miss Faithfull, he betook himself to Mrs. Ponsonby's, not quite without embarrassment, for he had not been alone with the mother and daughter since August.

'I am glad you did not come before,' said Mary, heartily; 'I have just done;' and she returned to her writing-table, while her mother was saying,

'We like it very much.'

'You have not been copying that wretched concern!' exclaimed Louis. 'Why, Mary, you must have been at it all night. It is a week's work.'

'Copying is not composing,' said Mary.

'But you have mended it, made it consecutive! If I had guessed that my father meant to trouble any one with it!'

'If you take pains with it, it may be very valuable,' said Mrs. Ponsonby. 'We have marked a few things that you had better revise before it goes to Oakstead.'

'Goes to Oakstead!' said Louis, faintly.

'Your father talks of sending it, to see if Sir Miles does not think it might tell well in one of the Reviews.'

'I hope not. I should lose all my faith in anonymous criticism, if they admitted such a crude undergraduate's *omnium gatherum*! Besides, what an immense task to make it presentable!'

'Is that the root of your humility?'

'Possibly. But for very shame I must doctor it, if Mary has wasted so much time over it. It does not look so bad in your hand!'

'It struck me whether you had rendered this Spanish story right.'

'Of course not. I never stuck to my dictionary.'

A sound dose of criticism ensued, tempered by repetitions of his father's pleasure; and next came some sympathy and discussion about the farm and Marksedge, in which the ladies took their usual earnest part, and Mary was as happy as ever in hearing of his progress. He said no word of their neighbours; but he could not help colouring when Mary said, as he wished her good-bye, 'We like the party in the House Beautiful so much! Miss Conway is such an acquisition to me! and they are doing all you could ever have wished for Clara.'

Mary was glad that she had said it.

Louis was not so glad. He thought it must have been an effort, then derided his vanity for the supposition.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FRUIT OF THE CHRISTMAS-TREE

Age, twine thy brows with fresh spring flowers,
And call a train of laughing hours ;
And bid them dance, and bid them sing :
And thou, too, mingle in the ring.—WORDSWORTH

THE 12th of January was the last day before James and Louis meant to return to Oxford, Jem taking Clara on from thence to school. It was to be the farewell to Christmas—one much enjoyed in Dynevor Terrace. Fitzjocelyn's absence was almost a relief to Clara ; she could not make up her mind to see him till she could hope their last encounter had been forgotten ; and in the meantime, her anticipations were fixed on the great 12th. She was aware of what the entertainment would consist, but was in honour bound to conceal her knowledge from Virginia and Louisa, who on their side affected great excitement and curiosity, and made every ostentation of guessing and peeping. Gifts were smuggled into the house from every quarter—some to take their chance, some directed with mottoes droll or affectionate. Clara prepared a few trifles, in which she showed that school had done something for her fingers, and committed her little parcels to her brother's care ; and Miss Mercy was the happiest of all, continually knocking at the locked door of the back drawing-room with gilded fir-cones, painted banners, or moss birds'-nests, from Miss Salome.

Miss King and Isabel had undertaken the main business. When roused from her pensive stillness, Isabel could be very eager, active, and animated ; and she worked with the exhilaration that she could freely enjoy, when unrestrained by perceiving that she was wanted to produce an effect. What woman's height and hand could not perform fell to the share of James, who, with his step-ladder and dexterous hands, was invaluable. Merrily, merrily did the three work, laughing over their suspended *bonbons*, their droll contrivances, or predicting the adaptations of their gifts ; and more and more gay was the laugh, the tutor more piquant, the governess more keen and clever, the young lady more vivacious, as the twilight darkened, and the tree became more laden, and the streamers and glass balls produced a more brilliant effect.

Proudly, when the task was accomplished, did they contemplate their work, and predict the aspect of their tinsel and frippery when duly lighted up. Then, as they dispersed to dress, James ran home, and hastily tapped at his sister's door.

'What is the matter ?' she cried. 'Have the tassels come off my purse ?'

'Nothing of the kind, but—' he came quite in, and looked

round restlessly, then hastily said, 'You gave me nothing for Miss Conway.'

'I wished it very much,' said Clara, 'but I could not bear to do anything trumpery for her. Oh, if one could give her anything worth having!'

'Clara, I had thought—but I did not know if you would like to part with it—'

'I had thought of it too,' said Clara; 'but I thought you would not like it to be given away.'

Pulling out a drawer, she opened an odd little box of queer curiosities, whence she took a case containing an exquisite ivory carving, a copy of the 'Madonna della Sedia,' so fine that a magnifier alone could fully reveal the delicacy and accuracy of the features and expression. It was mounted as a bracelet clasp, and was a remnant of poor Mr. Dynevor's treasures. It had been given to Mrs. Henry Frost, and had descended to her daughter.

'Should you be willing?' wistfully asked James.

'That I should! I have longed to give her what she would really care for. She has been so very kind—and her kindness is so very sweet in its graciousness! I shall always be the happier for the very thinking of it.'

'I am glad—' began Jem, warmly; but, breaking off, he added—'This would make us all more comfortable. It would lessen the weight of obligation, and that would be satisfactory to you.'

'I don't know. I like people to be so kind, that I can't feel as if I would pay them off, but as if I could do nothing but love them.'

'You did not imagine that I rate this as repayment!'

'Oh! no, no!'

'No! it is rather that nothing can be too precious—' then pausing—'You are sure you are willing, Clara?'

'Only too glad. I like it to be something valuable to us as well as in itself. If I only had a bit of black velvet, I could set it up.'

In ten minutes, Jem had sped to a shop and back again, and stood by as Clara stitched the clasp to the ribbon velvet; while there was an amicable dispute, he insisting that the envelope should bear only the initials of the true donor, and she maintaining that 'he gave the black velvet.' She had her way, and wrote, 'From her grateful C. F. D. and J. R. F. D.;' and as James took the little packet, he thanked her with an affectionate kiss—a thing so unprecedented at an irregular hour, that Clara's heart leapt up, and she felt rewarded for any semblance of sacrifice.

He told his grandmother that he had agreed with his sister that they could do no otherwise than present the ivory clasp; and Mrs. Frost, who had no specially tender associations with it, was satisfied to find that they had anything worth offering on equal terms.

She was to be of the party, and setting forth, they found the House Beautiful upside down—even the Faithfull parlour devoted to shawls and bonnets, and the two good old sisters in the drawing-room; Miss Salome, under the protection of little Louisa, in an easy-chair, opposite the folding-doors. Small children were clustered in shy groups round their respective keepers. Lady Conway was receiving her guests with the smile so engaging at first sight; Isabel moving from one to the other with stately grace and courtesy; Virginia watching for Clara, and both becoming merged in a mass of white skirts and glossy heads, occupying a wide area. Mrs. Frost was rapturously surrounded by half-a-dozen young men, Sydney Calcott foremost, former pupils enchanted to see her, and keeping possession of her all the rest of the evening. She was a dangerous person to invite, for the Northwold youth had no eyes but for her.

The children were presently taken down to tea in the dining-room by Miss King and Miss Mercy; and presently a chorus of little voices and peals of laughter broke out, confirming the fact, whispered by Delaford to his lady, that Lord Fitzjocelyn had arrived, and had joined the down-stairs party.

While coffee went round in the drawing-room, Isabel glided out to perform the lighting process.

‘Oh, Mr. Dynevor!’ she exclaimed, finding him at her side, ‘I did not mean to call you away.’

‘Mere unreason to think of the performance alone,’ said James, setting up his trusty ladder. ‘What would become of that black lace?’

‘Thank you, it may be safer and quicker.’

‘So far the evening is most successful,’ said Jem, lighting above as she lighted below.

‘That it is! I like Northwold better than any place I have been in since I left Thornton Conway. There is so much more heartiness and friendliness here than in ordinary society.’

‘I think Fitzjocelyn’s open sympathies have conduced—’

Isabel laughed, and he checked himself, disconcerted.

‘I beg your pardon,’ she said; ‘I was amused at the force of habit. If I were to say the Terrace chimneys did not smoke, you would say it was Lord Fitzjocelyn’s doing.’

‘Do not bid me do otherwise than keep him in mind.’

Down fell the highest candle: the hot wax dropping on Isabel’s arm caused her to exclaim, bringing Jem down in horror, crying, ‘I have hurt you! you are burnt!’

‘Oh, no, only startled. There is no harm done, you see,’ as she cracked away the cooled wax—‘not even a mark to remind me of this happy Christmas.’

‘And it has been a happy Christmas to you,’ he said, remounting.

‘Most happy. Nothing has been so peaceful or satisfactory in my wandering life.’

‘Shall I find you here at Easter?’

‘I fear not. Mamma likes to be in London early; but



“‘There is no harm done, you see,’ as she cracked away the cooled wax—‘not even a mark to remind me of this happy Christmas.’”—Page 174.



perhaps she may leave the schoolroom party here, as Louisa is gaining so much ground, and that would be a pledge of our return.'

'Too much joy,' said James, almost inaudibly.

'I hope Walter may spend his holidays here,' she pursued. 'It is a great thing for him to be with any one who can put a few right notions into his head.'

Jem abstained from, as usual, proposing Fitzjocelyn for his example, but only said that Walter was very susceptible of good impressions.

'And most heartily we thank you for all you have done for him,' said Isabel, doubting whether Walter's mother appreciated the full extent of it; 'indeed, we have all a great deal to thank you for. I hope my sisters and I may be the better all our lives for the helps and explanations you have given to us. Is that the last candle? How beautiful! We must open—'

'Miss Conway—'

'Yes'—she paused with her hand on the key.

'No, no—do not wait,' taking the key himself. 'Yet—yes, I must—I must thank you for such words—'

'My words?' said Isabel, smiling. 'For thanking you, or being happy here?'

'Both! both! Those words will be my never-failing charm. You little guess how I shall live on the remembrance. Oh, if I could only convey to you what feelings you have excited—'

The words broke from him as if beyond his control; and under the pressing need of not wasting the tapers, he instinctively unlocked the door as he spoke, and cut himself short by turning the handle, perhaps without knowing what he was about.

Instantly Lady Conway and Miss King each pushed a folding leaf, Isabel and James drew back on either side, and the spectators beheld the tall glistening evergreen, illuminated with countless little spires of light, glancing out among the dark leaves, and reflected from the gilt fir-cones, glass balls, and brilliant toys.

'Sister! sister!' cried Miss Mercy, standing by Miss Faithfull's chair, in the rear of the throng, and seizing her hand in ecstasy; 'it is like a dream! like what we have read of! Oh, the dear little children! So very kind of Lady Conway! Could you have imagined—?' She quite gasped.

'It is very pretty; but it was a nicer Christmas-tree last year at Lady Runnymede's,' said Louisa, with the air of a critic. 'There we had coloured lamps.'

'Little fastidious puss!' said Louis, 'I thought you keeping in the background out of politeness; but I see you are only *blasée* with Christmas-trees. I pity you! I could no more be critical at such a moment than I could analyze the jewels in Aladdin's cave.'

'Oh, if you and Miss Faithfull talk, Cousin Fitzjocelyn, you will make it seem quite new.'

'You will deride the freshness of our simplicity,' said Louis, but presently added, 'Miss Salome, have we not awakened to the enchanted land? Did ever mortal tree bear stars of living flame? Here are realized the fabled apples of gold—nay, the fir-cones of Nineveh, the jewel-fruits of Eastern story, depend from the same bough. Yonder lamps shine by fairy spell.'

'Now, Cousin Fitzjocelyn, do you think I suppose you so silly—

'Soft! The Dryad of the Enchanted Bower advances. Her floating robes, her holly crown, beseech her queenly charms.'

'As if you did not know that it is only Isabel!'

'Only! May the word be forgiven to a sister? Isabel! The name is all-expressive.'

'She is looking even more lovely than usual,' said Miss Faithfull. 'I never saw such a countenance.'

'She has a colour to-night,' added Miss Mercy, 'which does, as you say, make her handsomer than ever. Dear! dear! I hope she is not tired. I am so sorry I did not help her to light the tree!'

'I do not think it is fatigue,' said her sister. 'I hope it is animation and enjoyment—all I have ever thought wanting to that sweet face.'

'You are as bad as my prosaic cousin,' said Louis, 'disenchanted the magic bower and the wood-nymph into fir, wax, and modern young ladyhood.'

'There, cousin, it is you who have called her a modern young lady.'

Before Louisa had expressed her indignation, there was a call for her.

'The Sovereign of the Bower beckons,' said Louis. 'Favoured damsel, know how to deserve her smiles. Fairy gifts remain not with the unworthy.'

As he put her forward, some one made way for her. It was Mary, and he blushed at perceiving that she must have heard all his rodomontade. As if to make amends, he paused, and asked for Mrs. Ponsonby.

'Much more comfortable to-night, thank you;' and the pleasant, honest look of her friendly eyes relieved him by not reproaching him.

'I wish she were here. It is a prettier, more visionary sight than I could have conceived.'

'I wish she could see it; but she feared the crowd. Many people in a room seem to stifle her. Is Lord Ormersfield here?'

'No, it would not be his element. But imagine his having taken to walking with me! I really think he will miss me.'

'Really?' said Mary, amused.

'It is presumptuous; but he does not see well at night, and is not quite broken in to his spectacles. Mary, I hope you will walk over to see after him. Nothing would be so good for him as walking you back, and staying to dinner with you. Go right

into the library ; he would be greatly pleased. Can't you make some book excuse ? And you have the cottages to see. The people inaugurated the boilers with Christmas puddings.'

'Mr. Holdsworth told us how pleased they were. And the Norris's?'

'Mrs. Norris is delighted ; she has found a woman to wash, and says it will save her a maid. The people can get milk now : I assure you they look more wholesome already ! And Beecher has actually asked for two more houses in emulation. And Richardson found himself turned over to me !'

'Oh, that's right.'

'I've been at the plans all the afternoon. I see how to contrive the fireplace in the back room, that we could not have in the first set, and make them cheaper, too. My father has really made a point of that old decrepit Hailes being moved from Marksedge ; and, Mary, he and Richardson mean Inglewood to be made over to me for good. I am to put in a bailiff, and do as I can with it—have the profits or bear the losses. I think I have an idea—'

In spite of her willingness to hear the idea, Mary could not help asking, 'Have you sent off the Police article?'

'Hush, Mary ; it is my prime object to have it well forgotten.'

'Oh ! did not Sir Miles like it?'

'He said it wanted liveliness and anecdote. So the Santissima Hermandad, and all the extraneous history, were sent to him ; and then he was well content, and only wanted me to leave out all the Christian chivalry—all I cared to say—'

'You don't mean not to finish ? Your father was so pleased, Isabel so much struck ! It is a pity—'

'No, no ; you may forgive me, Mary—it is not pure laziness. It was mere rubbish without the point, which was too strong for the two politicians ; rubbish, any way. Don't tell me to go on with it ; it was a mere trial, much better let it die away. I really have no time ; if I don't mind my own business, I shall be a plucked gosling ; and that would go to his lordship's heart. Besides, I must get these plans done. Do you remember where we got the fire-bricks for the ovens?'

Mary was answering, when Walter came bursting through the crowd. 'Where is he ? Fitzjocelyn, it is your turn.'

'Here is a curious specimen for our great naturalist,' said Mrs. Frost, a glow in her cheeks, and her voice all stifled mirth and mischief.

It was a large nest of moss and horse-hair, partly concealed under the lower branches, and containing two huge eggs streaked and spotted with azure and vermillion, and a purple and yellow feather, labelled, 'Dropped by the parent animal in her flight, on the discovery of the nest by the crew of H.M.S. *Flying Dutchman*. North Greenland, April 1st, 1847. Qu. ? Female of *Equus Pegasus*. Respectfully dedicated to the Right Honourable Viscount Fitzjocelyn.'

'A fine specimen,' said the Viscount at once, with the air of a connoisseur, by no means taken by surprise. 'They are not very uncommon; I found one myself about the same date in the justice-room. I dare say Mr. Calcott recollects the circumstance.'

'Oh, my dear fellow,' exclaimed Sydney, instead of his father; 'you need not particularize. You always were a discoverer in that line.'

'True,' said Louis, 'but this is unique. North Greenland—ah! I thought it was from a Frosty country. Ha, Clara?'

'Not I; I know nothing of it,' cried Clara, in hurry and confusion, not yet able to be suspected of taking liberties with him.

'No?' said Louis, turning about his inquisition; 'I thought I knew the female that laid these eggs. The proper name is, I fancy, *Glacies Dynevorensis*—var. *Catharina*—perhaps—'

Walter and Louisa had brought their mother to see the nest, the point of which she comprehended as little as they; and not understanding how much amusement was betokened by her nephew's gravity, she protested that none of her party had devised it, nor even been privy to it, and that Mr. Dynevore must bear the blame; but he was very busy detaching the prizes from the tree, and hastily denied any concern with it. Aunt Catharine was obliged to console Lady Conway, and enchant Louis by owning herself the sole culprit, with no aid but Miss Mercy's. Together they had disposed the nest in its right locality, as soon as the Earl's absence was secure.

'I had not courage for it before him,' she laughed. 'As for this fellow, I knew he would esteem it a compliment.'

'As a tribute to his imagination?' said Isabel, who, in her mood of benevolence, could be struck with the happy understanding between aunt and nephew revealed by such a joke, so received.

'It would be a curious research,' said Louis, 'whether more of these nidifications result from over-imagination or the want of it.'

'Often from want of imagination, and no want of cowardice,' said Isabel.

'That sort of nest has not illuminated eggs like these,' said Louis. 'They are generally extremely full of gunpowder, and might be painted with a skull and cross-bones. I say, Clara, has Aunt Kitty considered the consequences? She has sacrificed her ostrich eggs! I can never part with these original productions of her genius.'

He exhibited his mare's nest with his own gay *bonhomie* to all who were curious; and presently, when every one's attention had been again recalled to the wonders which Isabel was distributing, and he had turned aside to dispose of his treasure, he heard a sound of soliloquy half aloud, 'I wonder whether she has it!' from Clara, who stood a little apart.

'What?' asked Louis.

'My ivory clasp with the Madonna,' said Clara. 'Jem and I thought it the only thing worthy of Miss Conway.'

'Hem!' said Louis; 'it is not your fault, Clara; but it would be graceful to learn to receive a favour.'

'A favour, but not a grand thing like this,' said Clara, showing a beautiful little case of working implements.

'Hardly worth, even intrinsically, your mother's bracelet,' said Louis. 'But I am not going to talk treason to the family doctrine, though it is very inconvenient to your friends.'

'Then you think we ought not to have done it?'

'That depends on what I can't decide.'

'What's that?'

'Whether you give it out of love or out of pride.'

'I think we gave it out of one, and excused it by the other.'

'Very satisfactory. To reward you, here is something for you to do. I shall never get at Aunt Kitty to-night. I see the midshipman, young Brewster, will not relinquish her; so will you or will she administer this letter to the Lady of Eschalott?'

'You don't mean that is Tom Madison!' exclaimed Clara. 'Why, it is like copper-plate. No more Fitsgoslings!'

'No, indeed! Is he not a clever fellow? He has just reached the stage of civilization that breaks out in dictionary words. I have been, in return, telling him the story of the Irish school-master who puzzled the magistrate's bench by a petition about a small cornuted animal, meaning a kid. But I should think it would be very edifying to Charlotte to see herself commemorated as the "individual at the Terrace," and his grandfather as "his aged relative." He sends the old man ten shillings this time, for he is promoted. Don't you think I may be proud of him? Is Mary gone home? She must hear about him.'

As he turned away in search of Mary, Clara felt a soft hand on her shoulder; and Isabel beckoned her to follow into the back drawing-room, where the tree was burnt out and deserted.

'I may thank *you*,' said Isabel, in a low, sweet voice, pressing her hand.

'And Jem,' said Clara; 'he thought of it first.'

'It is the most beautiful Christmas gift; but I do not like for you to part with it, my dear.'

'We both wished it, and grandmamma gave leave. We longed for you to have something we prized like this, for it belonged to my mamma. It is Jem's present too, for he went out and bought the black velvet.'

'Clasp it on for me, dear Clara. There!' and Isabel kissed the fingers which obeyed. 'It shall never leave my arm.'

Clara's face burnt with surprise and pleasure amounting to embarrassment, as Isabel expressed hopes of meeting again, and engaged her to write from school. She looked for her brother to take his share of thanks; but he was determinately doing his duty in cutting chicken and cake for those who desired supper, and he did not come in their way again till all the guests

were gone, and good night and good-bye were to be said at once.

Lady Conway was warm in expressing her hopes that Walter would enjoy the same advantages another holiday, and told Mr. Dynevor she should write to him. But Jem made little answer, nothing like a promise. Clara thought he had become stiff from some unknown affront, perhaps some oppressive present, for he seemed to intend to include all the young ladies in one farewell bow. But Isabel advanced with outstretched hand and flushing cheek, and her murmured 'Thank you' and confiding pressure drew from him such a grasp as could not easily be forgotten.

Clara's heart was all the lighter because she was sure that Fitzjocelyn had forgiven, and, what was more, forgotten. She had spoken naturally to him once more, and was ready for anything now—even though they had missed all confidential discussions upon school.

She gave Charlotte Tom Madison's letter. The little maiden took it, and twirled it about rather superciliously. 'What business has my young lord,' she thought, 'to fancy she cared for that poor fellow? Very likely he was improved, and she was glad of it; but she knew what was genteel now. Yes, she would read it at once; there was no fear that it would make her soft and foolish—she had got above that!'

CHAPTER XVII

THE RIVALS

'Which king, Bezonian?'—*Henry IV.*

SIR ROLAND of Provence remained in suspense whether to be a novice or an irrevocably pledged Hospitalier. The latter was most probable; and when Adeline's feelings had been minutely analyzed, Miss Conway discovered that she had better not show her morning's work to her sisters.

Clara and Louis pronounced Jem to be as savage as a bear all through the journey. Clara declared it was revenge for having been civil and amiable all through the vacation; and Louis uttered a theatrical aside, that even *that* could not have been maintained if he had not occasionally come to Ormersfield to relieve himself a little upon their two lordships.

Laugh as he might, Fitzjocelyn was much concerned and perplexed by his cousin's ill-humour, when it appeared more permanent than could be puffed off in a few ebullitions. Attempts to penetrate the gloom made it heavier, and Louis resolved to give it time to subside. He waited some days before going near James, and when he next walked to his college found him engaged with pupils. He was himself very

busy, and had missed his cousin several times before he at length found him alone.

'Why, Jem, old fellow, what are you about? You've not been near my rooms this term. Are you renouncing me in anticipation of my plucking?'

'You won't be plucked unless you go out of your senses for the occasion.'

'No thanks to your advice and assistance if I am not. But it would conduce to my equanimity, Jem, to know whether we are quarrelling, as in that case I should know how to demean myself.'

'I've no quarrel with you. You have far more reason—But,' added Jem, catching himself up, 'don't you know I've no leisure for trifling? The Ordination is the second week in March.'

'The Ordination!'

'Ay—you know it! My fellowship depends on it.'

'I never liked to contemplate it.' He sat down and mused, while James continued his occupation. Presently he said, 'Look here. Sir Miles Oakstead asked me if I had any clever Oxford friend to recommend. If he comes into office, he—'

'I'll be no great man's hanger-on.'

'This matter is not imminent. You are barely four-and-twenty. Wait a year or two; even a few months would—'

'You have tried my forbearance often enough,' broke in James; 'my object is—as you very well know—to maintain myself and mine without being liable to obnoxious patronage. If you think I should disgrace the office, speak out!'

Louis, without raising his eyes, only answered with a smile.

'Then, what do you mean? As to your notions of a vocation, ninety-nine out of a hundred are in my case. I have been bred up to this—nothing else is open—I mean to do my duty; and surely that is vocation—no one has a right to object—'

'No one; I beg your pardon,' meekly said Louis, taking up his stick to go; but both knew it was only a feint, and James, whose vehemence was exhausting itself, resumed, in an injured tone, 'What disturbs you? what is this scruple of yours?—you, who sometimes fancy you would have been a curate yourself.'

'I have just inclination enough that way to be able to perceive that you have none.'

'And is every one to follow his bent?'

'This is not a step to be taken against the grain, even for the best earthly motives. Jem! I only beg you to ask advice. For the very reason that you are irreproachable, you will never have it offered.'

'The present time, for instance!'

said James, laughing as best he might.

'That is nothing. I have no faith in my own judgment; but, thinking as I do of the profession and of you, I cannot

help believing that my distaste for seeing you in it must be an instinct.'

'Give me your true opinion and its grounds candidly, knowing that I would not ask another man living.'

'Nor me, if I did not thrust it on you.'

'Now for it! Let us hear your objection.'

'Simply this. I do not see that anything impels you to take Holy Orders immediately, except your wish to be independent, and irrevocably fixed before your uncle can come home. This seems to me to have a savour of something inconsistent with what you profess. It might be fine anywhere else, but it will not bear being brought into the light of the sanctuary. No, I cannot like it. I have no doubt many go up for Ordination far less fit than you; but—Jem, I wish you would not. If you would but wait a year!'

'No, Fitzjocelyn, my mind is made up. I own that I might have preferred another course, and Heaven knows it is not that I think myself worthy of this; but I have been brought up to this, and I will not waver. It is marked out for me as plainly as your earldom for you, and I will do my duty in it as my appointed calling. There lies my course of honest independence: you call it pride—see what those are who are devoid of it: there lie my means of educating my sister, providing for my grandmother. I can see no scruple that should deter me.'

Fitzjocelyn having said his say, it was his turn and his nature to be talked down.

'In short,' concluded James, walking about the room, 'there is no alternative. Waiting for a College living is bad enough, but nothing else can make happiness even possible.'

'One would think you meant *one* sort of happiness,' said Louis, with a calm considering tone, and look of inquiry which James could not brook.

'What else?' he cried. 'Fool and madman that I am to dwell on the hopeless—'

'Why should it be hopeless?—' began Louis.

'Hush! you are the last person with whom I could discuss this subject,' he said, trying to be fierce, but with more sorrow than anger. 'I must bear my burden alone. Believe me, I struggled hard. If you and I be destined to clash, one comfort is, that even I could never quarrel with you.'

'I have not the remotest idea of your meaning.'

'So much the better. No, so much the worse. You are not capable of feeling what I do for her, or you would have hated me long ago. Do not stay here! I do not know that I can quite bear the sight of you—But don't let me lose you, Louis.'

James wrung the hand of his cousin; and no sooner was he alone, than he began to pace the room distractedly.

'Poor Jem!' soliloquized Fitzjocelyn. 'At least, I am glad the trouble is love, not the Ordination. But as to his meaning! He gives me to understand that we are rivals— It is

the most absurd thing I ever knew—I declare I don't know whether he means Mary or Isabel. I suppose he would consider Mary's fortune a barrier—No, she is too serene for his storms—worthy, most worthy—but she would hate to be worshipped in that wild way. Besides, I am done for in that quarter. No clashing there—! Nay, the other it can never be—after all his efforts to lash me up at Christmas. Yet, he was much with her; he made Clara sacrifice the clasp to her. Hm! She is an embodied romance, deserving to be raved about; while for poor dear Mary, it would be simply ridiculous. I wish I could guess—it is too absurd to doubt, and worse to ask; and, what's more, he would not stand it. If I did but know! I'm not so far gone yet, but that I could leave the field to him, if that would do him any good. Heigh ho! it would be *en règle* to begin to hate him, and be as jealous as Bluebeard; but there! I don't know which it is to be about, and one can't be jealous for two ladies at once, luckily, for it would be immensely troublesome, unless a good, hearty quarrel would be wholesome to revive his spirits. It is a bad time for it, though! Well, I hope he does not mean Mary—I could not bear for her to be tormented by him. That other creature might reign over him like the full moon dispersing clouds. Well! this is the queerest predicament I ever heard of!' And on he wandered, almost as much diverted by the humour of the doubt, as annoyed by the dilemma.

He had no opportunity for farther investigation: James removed himself so entirely from his society, that he was obliged to conclude that the prevailing mood was that of not being quite able to bear the sight of him. His consolation was the hope of an opening for some generous proceeding, though how this should be accomplished was not visible, since it was quite as hard to be generous with other people's hearts as to confer a benefit on a Pendragon. At any rate, he was so confident of Jem's superiority, as to have no fear of carrying off the affection of any one whom his cousin wished to win.

James was ordained, and shortly after went to some pupils for the Easter vacation, which was spent by Louis at Christchurch, in studying hard. The preparation for going up for his degree ended by absorbing him entirely, as did every other pursuit to which he once fairly devoted himself, and for the first time he gave his abilities full scope in the field that ought long ago to have occupied them. When, finally, a third class was awarded to him, he was conscious that it might have been a first, but for his past waste of time.

He was sorry to leave Oxford: he had been happy there in his own desultory fashion; and the additional time that his illness had kept him an undergraduate, had been welcome as deferring the dreaded moment of considering what was to come next. He had reached man's estate almost against his will.

He was to go to join his father in London; and he carried thither humiliation for having, by his own fault, missed the

honours that, too late, he had begun to value as a means of gratifying his father.

The Earl, however, could hardly have taken anything amiss from Louis. After having for so many years withheld all the *laissez-aller* of paternal affection, when the right chord had once been touched, his fondness for his grown-up son had the fresh exulting pride, and almost blindness, that would ordinarily have been lavished on his infancy. Lord Ormersfield's sentiments were few and slowly adopted, but they had all the permanence and force of his strong character; and his affection for Fitz-jocelyn partook both of parental glory in a promising only son, and of that tenderness, at once protecting and dependent, that fathers feel for daughters. This was owing partly to Louis's gentle and assiduous attentions during the last vacation, and also to his long illness, and remarkable resemblance to his mother, which rendered fondness of him a sort of tribute to her, and restored to the Earl some of the transient happiness of his life.

It was a second youth of the affections, but it was purchased by a step towards age. The anxiety, fatigue, and various emotions of the past year had told on the Earl; and though still strong, vigorous, and healthy, the first touch of autumn had fallen on him—he did not find his solitary life so self-sufficing as formerly, and craved the home feeling of the past Christmas. So the welcome was twice as warm as Louis had expected; and as he saw the melancholy chased away, the stern gray eyes lighted up, and the thin, compressed lips relaxed into a smile, he forgot his aversion to the well-appointed rooms in Jermyn Street, and sincerely apologized that he had not brought home more credit to satisfy his father.

'Oakstead was talking it over with me,' was the answer; 'and we reckoned up many more third-class men than first who have distinguished themselves.'

'Many thanks to Sir Miles,' said Louis, laughing. 'My weak mind would never have devised such consolation.'

'Perhaps the exclusive devotion to study which attains higher honours may not be the best introduction to practical life.'

'It is doing the immediate work with the whole might.'

'You do work with all your might.'

'Ay! but too many irons in the fire, and none of them red-hot through, have been my bane.'

'You do not set out in life without experience; I am glad your education is finished, Louis!' said his father, turning to contemplate him, as if the sight filled up some void.

'Are you?' said Louis, wearily. 'I don't think I am. It becomes my duty—or yours, which is a relief—to find out the next stage.'

'Have you no wishes?'

'Not at the present speaking, thank you. If I went out and talked to any one, I might have too many.'

'No views for your future life?'

'Thus far: to do as little harm as may be—to be of some use at home—and to make turnips grow in the upland at Inglewood. I have some vague fancy to see foreign parts, especially now they are all in such a row—it would be such fun—but I suppose you would not trust me there now. Here I am for you to do as you please with me—a gracious permission, considering that you did not want it. Only the first practical question is how to get this money from Jem to Clara. I should like to call on her, but I suppose that would hardly be according to the proprieties.'

'I would walk to the school with you, if you wish to see her. My aunt will be glad to hear of her, if we go home to-morrow.'

'Are you thinking of going home?' exclaimed Louis, joyfully coming to life.

'Yes; but for a cause that will grieve you. Mrs. Ponsonby is worse, and has written to ask me to come down.'

'Materially worse?'

'I fear so. I showed my aunt's letter to Hastings, who said it was the natural course of the disease, but that he thought it would have been less speedy. I fear it has been hastened by reports from Peru. She had decided on going out again; but the agitation overthrew her, and she has been sinking ever since,' said Lord Ormersfield, mournfully.

'Poor Mary!'

'For her sake I must be on the spot, if for no other cause. If I had but a home to offer her!'

Louis gave a deep sigh, and presently asked for more details of Mrs. Ponsonby's state.

'I believe she is still able to sit up and employ herself at times, but she often suffers dreadfully. They are both wonderfully cheerful. She has little to regret.'

'What a loss she will be! Oh, father! what will you do without her?'

'I am glad that you have known her. She has been more than a sister to me. Things might have been very different, if that miserable marriage had not separated us for so many years.'

'How could it have happened? How was it that she—so good and wise—did not see through the man?'

'She would, if she had been left to herself; but she was not. My mother discovered, when too late, that there had been foolish, impertinent jokes of that unfortunate trifler, poor Henry Frost, that made her imagine herself suspected of designs on me.'

'Mary would never have attended to such folly!' cried Louis.

'Mary is older. Besides, she loved the man, or thought she did. I believe she thinks herself attached to him still. But for Mary's birth, there would have been a separation long ago. There ought to have been; but, after my father's death, there was no one to interfere! What would I not have given to have been her brother? Well! I never could see why one like her was so visited—!' Then rousing himself, as though tender

reminiscences were waste of time, he added, 'There you see the cause of the caution I gave you with regard to Clara Dynevor. It is not fair to expose a young woman to misconstructions and idle comments, which may goad her to vindicate her dignity by acting in a manner fatal to her happiness. Now,' he added, having drawn his moral, 'if we are to call on Clara, this would be the fittest time. I have engaged for us both to dine at Lady Conway's this evening: I thought you would not object.'

'Thank you; but I am sure you cannot wish to go out after such news.'

'There is not sufficient excuse for refusing. There is to be no party, and it would be a marked thing to avoid it.'

Louis hazarded a suggestion that the meeting with Clara would be to little purpose if they were all to sit in state in the drawing-room; and she was asked for on the plea of going to see the new Houses of Parliament. The Earl of Ormersfield's card and compliments went up-stairs, and Miss Frost Dynevor appeared, with a demure and astonished countenance, which changed instantly to ecstasy when she saw that the Earl was not alone. Not at all afraid of love, but only of misconstructions, he good-naturedly kept aloof, while Clara, clinging to Louis' arm, was guided through the streets, and in and out among the blocks of carved stone on the banks of the Thames, interspersing her notes of admiration and his notes on heraldry with more comfortable confidences than had fallen to their lot through the holidays.

His first hope was that Clara might reveal some fact to throw light on the object of her brother's affections, but her remarks only added to his perplexity. Once, when they had been talking of poor Mary, and lamenting her fate in having to return to her father, Louis hazarded the conjecture that she might find an English home.

'There is her aunt in Bryanston Square,' said Clara. 'Or if she would only live with us! You see I am growing wise, as you call it: I like her now.'

'That may be fortunate,' said Louis. 'You know her destination according to Northwold gossip.'

'Nonsense! Jem would scorn an heiress if she were ten times prettier. He will never have an escutcheon of pretence like the one on the old soup-tureen that the Lady of Eschalott broke, and Jane was so sorry for because it was the last of the old Cheveleigh china.'

Louis made another experiment. 'Have you repented yet of giving away your clasp?'

'No, indeed! Miss Conway always wears it. She should be richly welcome to anything I have in the world.'

'You and Jem saw much more of them than I did.'

'Whose fault was that? Jem was always raving about your stupidity in staying at home.'

He began to question whether his interview with James had

been a dream. As they were walking back towards the school, Clara went on to tell him that Lady Conway had called and taken her to a rehearsal of a concert of ancient music, and that Isabel had taken her for one or two drives into the country.

'This must conduce to make school endurable,' said Louis.

'I think I hate it more because I hate it less.'

'Translate, if you please.'

'The first half-year, I scorned them all, and they scorned me ; and that was comfortable—'

'And consistent. Well?'

'The next, you had disturbed me ; I could not go on being savage with the same satisfaction ; and their tuft-hunting temper began to discharge itself in such civility to me, that I could not give myself airs with any peace.'

'Have you made no friends?'

'One and a half. The whole one is a good, rough, stupid girl, who comes to school because she can't learn, and is worth all the rest put together. The half is Caroline Salter, who is openly and honestly purse-proud, has no toad-eating in her nature, and straightforwardly contemns high-blood and no money. We fought ourselves into respect for one another ; and now, I verily believe, we are fighting ourselves into friendship. She is the only one that is proud, not vain ; so we understand each other. As to the rest, they adore Caroline Salter's enamelled watch one day ; and the next I should be their "dearest" if I would but tell them what we have for dinner at Ormersfield, and what colour your eyes are !'

'The encounters have made you so epigrammatic and satirical, that there is no coming near you.'

'Oh, Louis ! if you knew all, you would despise me as I do myself ! I do sometimes get drawn into talking grandly about Ormersfield ; and though I always say what I am to be, I know that I am as vain and proud as any of them : I am proud of being poor, and of the Pendragons, and of not being silly ! I don't know which is self-respect, and which is pride !'

'I have always had my doubts about that quality of self-respect. I never could make out what one was to respect.'

'Oh, dear ! *les voila !*' cried Clara, as, entering Hanover Square, they beheld about twenty damsels coming out of the garden in couples. 'I would not have had it happen for the whole world !' she added, abruptly withdrawing the arm that had clung to him so trustfully across many a perilous crossing.

She seemed to intend to slip into the ranks without any farewells ; but the Earl, with politeness that almost confounded the little elderly governess, returned thanks for having been permitted the pleasure of her company ; and Louis, between mischief and good-nature, would not submit to anything but a hearty, cousinly squeeze of the hand, nor relinquish it till he had forced her to utter articulately the message to grandmamma that she had been muttering with her head averted. At last it

was spoken sharply, and her hand drawn petulantly away, and, without looking back at him, her high, stiff head vanished into the house, towering above the bright rainbow of ribbons, veils, and parasols.

The evening would have been very happy, had not Lord Ormersfield looked imperturbably grave and inaccessible to his sister-in-law's blandishments. She did not use the most likely means of disarming him when she spoke of making a tour in the summer. It had been a long promise that Isabel and Virginia should go to see their old governess at Paris; but if France still were in too disturbed a state, they might enjoy themselves in Belgium, and perhaps her dear Fitzjocelyn would accompany them as their escort.

His eyes had glittered at the proposal before he recollected the sorrow that threatened his father, and began to decline, protesting that he should be the worst escort in the world, since he always attracted accidents and adventures. But his aunt, discovering that he had never been abroad, became doubly urgent, and even appealed to his father.

'As far as I am concerned, Fitzjocelyn may freely consult his own inclinations,' said the Earl, so gravely, that Lady Conway could only turn aside the subject by a laugh, and assurance that she did not mean to give him up. She began to talk of James Frost, and her wishes to secure him a second time as Walter's tutor in the holidays.

'You had better take him with you,' said Louis; 'he would really be of use to you, and how he would enjoy the sight of foreign parts!'

Isabel raised her head with a look of approbation, such as encouraged him to come a little nearer, and speak of the pleasure that her kindness had given to Clara.

'There is a high spirit and originality about Clara, which make her a most amusing companion.'

Isabel replied, 'I am very glad of an hour with her, especially now that I am without my sisters.'

'She must be such a riddle to her respectable schoolfellows, that intercourse beyond them must be doubly valuable.'

'Poor child! Is there no hope for her but going out as a governess?'

'Unluckily, we have no Church patronage for her brother; the only likely escape—unless, indeed, the uncle in Peru, whom I begin to regard as rather mythical, should send an unavoidable shower of gold on them.'

'I hope not,' said Isabel; 'I could almost call their noble poverty a sacred thing. I never saw anything so beautiful as the reverent affection shown to Mrs. Dynevor on Louisa's birthday, when she was the Queen of the Night, and looked it, and her old pupils vied with each other in doing her honour. I have remembered the scene so often in looking at our faded dowagers here.'

'I would defy Midas to make my Aunt Catharine a faded dowager,' said Louis.

'No; but he could have robbed their homage of half—nay, all its grace.'

They talked of Northwold, and Isabel mentioned various details of Mrs. Ponsonby, which she had learnt from Miss King, and talked of Mary with great feeling and affection. Never had Louis had anything so like a conversation with Isabel, and he was more bewitched than ever by the enthusiasm and depth of sensibilities which she no longer concealed by coldness and reserve. In fact, she had come to regard him as an accessory of Northwold, and was delighted to enjoy some exchange of sympathy upon Terrace subjects—above all, when separated from the schoolroom party. Time had brought her to perceive that the fantastic Viscount did not always wear motley; and it was almost as refreshing as meeting with Clara, to have some change from the two worlds in which she lived. In her imaginary world, Adeline had just been rescued from the Corsairs by a knight hospitalier, with his vizor down, and was being conducted home by him, with equal probabilities of his dying at her feet of a concealed mortal wound, or conducting her to her convent gate, and going off to be killed by the Moors. The world of gaiety was more hollow and wearisome than ever; and the summons was as unwelcome to her as to Fitzjocelyn, when Lord Ormersfield reminded him that the ladies were going to an evening party, and that it was time to take leave.

'Come with us, Fitzjocelyn,' said his aunt. 'They would be charmed to have you;' and she mentioned some lions, whose names made Louis look at his father.

'I will send the carriage for you,' said the Earl; but Louis had learnt to detect the tone of melancholy reluctance in that apparently unalterable voice, and at once refused. Perhaps it was for that reason that Isabel let him put on her opera-cloak and hand her down-stairs. 'I don't wonder at you,' she said; 'I wish I could do the same.'

'I wished it at first,' he answered; 'but I could not have gone without a heavy heart.'

'Are you young enough to expect to go to any gaieties without a heavy heart?'

'I am sorry for you,' said he, in his peculiar tone: 'I suppose I am your elder.'

'I am almost twenty-four,' she said, with emphasis.

'Indeed! That must be the age for care, to judge by the change it has worked in Jem Frost.'

The words were prompted by a keen, sudden desire to mark their effect; but he failed to perceive any, for they were in a dark part of the entry, and her face was turned away.

'Fitzjocelyn,' said the Earl, on the way home, 'do not think it necessary to look at me whenever you receive an invitation.'

It makes us both appear ridiculous, and you are in every respect your own master.'

'I had rather not, thank you,' said Louis, in an almost provokingly indifferent tone.

'It is full time you should assume your own guidance.'

'How little he knows how little that would suit him!' thought Louis, sighing despondingly. 'Am I called on to sacrifice myself in everything, and never even satisfy him?'

CHAPTER XVIII

REST FOR THE WEARY

Therefore, arm thee for the strife
All throughout this mortal life,
Soldier now and servant true,
Earth behind, and heaven in view.—REV. I. WILLIAMS

THE first impression on arriving at Northwold was, that the danger had been magnified. Mrs. Frost's buoyant spirits had risen at the first respite; and though there was a weight on Mary's brow, she spoke cheerfully, and as if able to attend to other interests, telling Louis of her father's wish for some good workman to superintend the mines, and asking him to consult his friends at Illershall on the subject.

Lord Ormersfield came down encouraged by his visit to the invalid, whom he had found dressed and able to converse nearly as usual. She begged him to come to dinner the next day, and spend the evening with her, promising with a smile that if he would bring Louis, their aunt should chaperon Mary.

When the Earl went up-stairs after dinner, the other three closed round the fire, and talked in a tranquil, subdued strain, on various topics, sometimes grave, sometimes enlivened by the playfulness inherent in two of the party. Aunt Kitty spoke of her earlier days, and Louis and Mary ventured questions that they would have ordinarily deemed intrusive. Yet it was less the matter than the manner of their dialogue—the deep, unavowed fellow-feeling and mutual reliance—which rendered it so refreshing and full of a kind of repose. Louis felt it like the strange bright stillness, when birds sing their clearest, fullest notes and the horizon reach of sky beams with the softest, brightest radiance, just ere it be closed out by the thunder-cloud, whose first drops are pausing to descend; and to Mary it was peace—peace which she was willing gratefully to taste to the utmost, from the instinctive perception that the call had come for her to brace all her powers of self-control and fortitude; while to the dear old aunt, besides her enjoyment of her darling's presence, each hour was a boon that she could believe the patient or the daughter relieved and happy.

Louis was admitted for a few minutes' visit to the sick

chamber, and went up believing that he ought to be playful and cheerful ; but he was nearly overcome by Mrs. Ponsonby's own brightness, as she hoped that her daughter and aunt had made themselves agreeable.

'Thank you, I was never so comfortable, not even when my foot was bad.'

'I believe you consider that a great compliment.'

'Yes, I never was so much off my own mind, nor on other people's : ' and the recollection of all he owed to Mrs. Ponsonby's kindness rushing over him, he looked so much affected, that Mary was afraid of his giving way, and spoke of other matters ; her mother responded, and he came away quite reassured, and believing Mrs. Frost's augury, that at the next call the invalid would be in the drawing-room.

On the way home, however, his father overthrew such hopes, and made him aware of the true state of the case,—namely, that this was but the lull before another attack, which, whether it came within weeks or days, would probably be the last.

'Does Mary know ?'

'She does. She bears up nobly.'

'And what is to become of her ?'

The Earl sighed deeply. 'Lima is her destiny. Her mother is bent on it, and says that she wishes it herself ; but on one thing I am resolved : she shall not go alone ! I have told her mother that I *will* go with her, and not leave her without seeing what kind of home that man has for her. Mary—the mother, I mean—persists in declaring that he has real affection for his child, and that her presence will save him.'

'If anything could—' broke out Louis.

'It should ! it ought ; but I do not trust him. I know Robert Ponsonby as his wife has never chosen to know him. This was not a time for disguise, and I told her plainly what I thought of risking her daughter out there. But she called it Mary's duty—said that he was fully to be trusted where his child was concerned, and that Mary was no stranger at Lima, but could take care of herself, and had many friends besides Oliver Dynevor there. But I told her that go with her I would !'

'You to take the voyage ! Was not she glad ?'

'I think she was relieved ; but she was over-grateful and distressed, and entreating me to be patient with him. She need not fear. I never was a hasty man ; and I shall only remember that she bears his name, and that he is Mary's father—provided always that it is fit Mary should remain with him. Miserable ! I can understand that death may well come as a friend—But her daughter !' he exclaimed, giving way more than he might have done anywhere but in the dark ; 'how can she endure to leave her to such a father—to such prospects !'

'She knows it is not only to such a father that she leaves her,' murmured Louis.

'Her words—almost her words,' said the Earl, between earnest-

ness and impatience ; 'but when these things come to pressing realities, it is past me how such sayings are a consolation.'

'Not if they were no more than sayings.'

There was silence. Louis heard an occasional groaning sigh from his father, and sat still, with feelings strongly moved, and impelled to one of his sudden and impetuous resolutions.

The next morning, he ordered his horse, saying he would bring the last report from the Terrace.

That afternoon, Mrs. Ponsonby observed a tremulousness in Mary's hand, and a willingness to keep her face turned away ; and, on more minute glances, a swelling of the eyelids was detected.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, 'you should take a walk to-day. Pray go out with the Conways.'

'Oh, no, thank you, mamma.'

'If the cousins come in from Ormersfield, I shall tell Louis to take you to look at his farm. It would be very good for you—My dear, what is it?' for Mary's ears and neck, all that she could see were crimson.

'Oh, mamma! he has been doing it again. I did not mean to have told you—' said Mary, the strong will to be calm forcing back the tears and even the flush.

'Nay, dear child, nothing can hurt me now. You *must* let me share all with you to the last. What did you say to him?'

'I told him that I could not think of such things now,' said Mary, almost indignantly.

'And he?'

'He begged my pardon, and said he only did it because he thought it might be a relief to you.'

'Only ; did he say "only" ?'

'I am not sure. At least,' she added, with a deep sigh, 'I thought he meant *only*—'

'And you, my dearest ; if you had not thought he meant only?'

'Don't ask me, mamma ; I cannot think about it!'

'Mary, dearest, I do wish to understand you.'

'Is it of any use for me to ask myself?' said Mary.

'I think it is. I do not say that there might not be insuperable obstacles ; but I believe we ought to know whether you are still indifferent to Louis.'

'Oh, that I never was! Nobody could be!'

'You know what I mean,' said her mother, slightly smiling.

'Mamma, I don't know what to say,' replied Mary, after a pause. 'I had thought it wrong to let my thoughts take that course ; but when he spoke in his own soft, gentle voice, I felt, and I can't help it, that—he—could—comfort—me—better—than—any one.'

Not hesitating, but slowly, almost inaudibly, she brought out the words ; and, as the tears gushed out irrepressibly with the last, she hastened from the room and was seen no more till she had recovered composure, and seemed to have dismissed the subject.

Louis kept this second attempt a secret ; he was not quite sure how he felt, and did not wish to discuss his rejection. At breakfast he received a note from Mrs. Ponsonby, begging him to come to the Terrace at three o'clock ; and the hope thus revived made him more conversational than he had been all the former day.

He found that Mary was out walking, and he was at once conducted to Mrs. Ponsonby's room, where he looked exceedingly rosy and confused, till she began by holding out her hand, and saying, 'I wish to thank you.'

'I am afraid I vexed Mary,' said Louis, with more than his usual simplicity ; 'but do you think there is no hope ? I knew it was a bad time, but I thought it might make you more at ease on her account.'

'You meant all that was most kind.'

'I thought I might just try,' pursued he, disconsolately, 'whether she did think me any steadier. I hope she did not think me very troublesome. I tried not to harass her much.'

'My dear Louis, it is not a question of what you call steadiness. It is the old story of last summer, when you thought us old ones so much more romantic than yourself.'

'You are thinking of Miss Conway,' said Louis, blushing, but with curious *naïveté*. 'Well, I have been thinking of that, and I really do not believe there was anything in it. I did make myself rather a fool at Beauchastel, and Jem would have made me a greater one ; but you know my father put a stop to it. Thinking her handsomer than other people can't be love, can it ?'

'Not alone, certainly.'

'And actually,' he pursued, 'I don't believe I ever think of her when I am out of the way of her ! No, indeed ! if I had not believed that was all over, do you think I could have said what I did yesterday ?'

'Not unless you *believed* so.'

'Well, but really you don't consider how little I have seen of her. I was in awe of her at first, and since, I have kept away on purpose. I never got on with her at all till the other evening. I don't believe I care for her one bit. Then,' suddenly pausing, and changing his tone, 'you don't trust me after all.'

'I do. I trust your principle and kindness implicitly ; but I think the very innocence of your heart prevents you from knowing what you are about.'

'It is very hard,' said Louis ; 'every one will have it that I must be in love, till I shall have to believe so myself, and when I know it cannot come to good.'

'You are making yourself more simple than you really are,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, half provoked.

Louis shut his eyes, and seemed to be rousing his faculties : then, taking a new turn, he earnestly said, 'You know that the promises must settle the question, and keep my affections fast.'

'Ah, Louis ! there is the point. Others, true and sincere as

yourself, have broken their own hearts, and those of others, from having made vows in wilful ignorance of latent feelings. It would be a sin in me to allow you to bind yourself to Mary, with so little comprehension as you have of your own sentiments.'

'Then I have done wrong in proposing it.'

'What would have been wrong in some cases, was more of blindness—ay, and kindness—in you. Louis, I cannot tell you my gratitude for your wish to take care of my dear girl,' she said, with tears in her eyes. 'I hope you fully understand me.'

'I see I have made a fool of myself again, and that you have a right to be very angry with me.'

'Not quite,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, smiling; 'but I am going to give you some advice. Settle your mind as to Miss Conway. Your father is beginning to perceive that his distrust was undeserved; he has promised me not to object in case it should be for your true happiness; and I do believe, for my own part, that, in some respects, she is better fitted for his daughter-in-law than my poor Mary.'

'No one was ever half as good as Mary!' cried Louis. 'And this is what you tell me!'

'Mind, I don't tell you to propose to her, nor to commit yourself in any way: I only tell you to put yourself in a position to form a reasonable judgment of your own feelings. That is due to her, to yourself, and to your wife, be she who she may.'

Louis sighed, and presently added, smiling, 'I am not going to rave about preferences for another; but I do want to know whether anything can be done for poor *Jem Frost*.'

'Ha! has he anything of this kind on his mind?'

'He does it in grand style—disconsolate, frantic, and frosty; but he puzzles me completely by disclosing nothing but that he has no hope, and thinks me his rival. Can nothing be done?'

'No, Louis,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, decidedly; 'I have no idea that there is anything in that quarter. What may be on his mind I cannot tell: I am sure that he is not on Mary's.'

Louis rose. 'I have tired you,' he said, 'and you are very patient with my fooleries.'

'You have been very patient with many a lecture of mine, Louis.'

'There are very few who would have thought me worth lecturing.'

'Ah, Louis! if I did not like you so well for what you are, I should still feel the right to lecture you, when I remember the night I carried you to your father, and tried to make him believe that you would be his comfort and blessing. I think you have taught him the lesson at last!'

'You have done it all,' said Louis, with deep feeling.

'And now, may I say what more I want to see in you? If you could acquire more resolution, more manliness—will you pardon my saying so?'

'Ah! I have always found myself the identical weak man that all books give up as a hopeless case,' said Louis, accepting the imputation more easily than she could have supposed possible.

'No,' she said, vigorously, 'you have not come to your time of life without openings to evil that you could not have resisted if you had been really weak.'

'Distaste—and rather a taste for being quizzed,' said Louis.

'Those are not weakness. Your will is indolent, and you take refuge in fancying that you want strength. Rouse yourself, not to be drifted about—make a line for yourself.'

'My father will have me walk in no line but his own.'

'You have sense not to make duty to him an excuse for indolence and dislike of responsibility. You have often disappointed yourself by acting precipitately; and now you are throwing yourself prone upon him, in a way that is unwise for you both.'

'I don't know what to do!' said Louis. 'When I thought the aim of my life was to be to devote myself to his wishes, you—ay, and he too—tell me to stand alone.'

'It will be a disappointment to him, if you do not act and decide for yourself—yes, and worse than disappointment. He knows what your devotional habits are; and if he see you wanting in firmness or energy, he will set down all the rest as belonging to the softer parts of your nature.'

'On the contrary,' exclaimed Louis, indignantly, 'all the resolution I ever showed came from nothing else!'

'I know it. Let him see that these things make a man of you; and, Louis—you feel what a difference it might make!'

Louis bowed his head thoughtfully.

'You, who are both son and daughter to him, may give up schemes and pleasures for his sake, and may undertake work for which you have no natural turn; but, however you may cross your *inclinations*, never be led contrary to your *judgment*. Then, and with perseverance, I think you will be safe.'

'Perseverance—your old lesson.'

'Yes; you must learn to work over the moment when novelty is gone and failure begins, even though your father should treat the matter as a crotchet of your own. If you know it is worth doing, go on, and he will esteem you and it.'

'My poor private judgment! you work it hard! when it has generally only run me full-drive into some egregious blunder!'

'Not your true deliberate judgment, exercised with a sense of responsibility. Humility must not cover your laziness. You have such qualities and such talents as must be intended to do good to others, not to be trifled away in fitful exertions. Make it your great effort to see clearly, and then to proceed steadfastly, without slackening either from weariness or the persuasions of others.'

'And you won't let me have the one person who can see clearly, and keep me steady?'

'To be your husband, instead of your wife? No, Louis; you must learn to take yourself in your own hands, and lean neither on your father, nor on any one else on earth, before you can be fit for Mary, or—'

'And if I did?' began Louis.

'You would make a man of yourself,' she said, interrupting him. 'That is the first thing—not a reed shaken with the wind. You *can* do it; there is nothing that Grace cannot do.'

'I know there is not,' said Louis, reverently.

'And, oh! the blessing that you would so bring on yourself and on your dear father! You have already learnt to make him happier than I ever looked to see him; and you must be energetic and consistent, that so he may respect, not you, but the Power which can give you the strength.'

Louis's heart was too full to make any answer. Mrs. Ponsonby lay back in her chair, as though exhausted by the energy with which she had spoken the last words; and there was a long silence. He thought he ought to go, and yet could not resolve to move. At last she spoke—'Good-bye, Louis. Come what may, I know Mary will find in you the—all that I have found your father.'

'Thank you, at least, for saying that,' said Louis. 'If you would only hold out a hope—I wish it more than ever now! I do not believe that I should ever do as well with any one else. Will you not give me any prospect?'

'Be certain of your own heart, Louis! Nay,' as she saw his face brighten, 'do not take that as a promise. Let me give you a few parting words, as the motto I should like to leave with you—"Quit yourselves like men; be strong." And so, Louis, whatever be your fixed and resolute purpose, so it be accordant with the Will of Heaven, you would surely, I believe, attain it; and well do you know how I should rejoice to see—' She broke off, and said more feebly, 'I must not go on any longer. Let me wish you good-bye, Louis: I have loved you only less than my own child!'

Louis knelt on one knee beside her, held her hand, and bowed down his face to hide the shower of tears that fell, while a mother's kiss and a mother's blessing were on his brow.

He went down-stairs and out of the house, and took his horse from the inn stables, without one word to any one. The ostlers said to each other that the young lord was in great trouble about the lady at the Terrace.

Mary came home; and if she knew why that long walk had been urged on her, she gave no sign. She saw her mother worn and tired, and she restrained all perception that she was conscious that there had been agitation. She spoke quietly of the spring flowers that she had seen, and of the people whom she had met; she gave her mother her tea, and moved about with almost an increase of the studied quietness of the sick-room.

Only, when Mrs. Frost came in for an hour, Mary drew back into a corner with her knitting, and did not speak.

'Mary,' said her mother, when she came back from lighting her aunt down-stairs, 'come to me, my child.'

Mary came, and her mother took both her hands. They were chilly; and there was a little pulse on Mary's temple that visibly throbbed, and almost seemed to leap, with fearful rapidity.

'Dear child, I had no power to talk before, or I would not have kept you in suspense. I am afraid it will not do.'

'I was sure of it,' said Mary, almost in a whisper. 'Dear mamma, you should not have vexed and tired yourself.'

'I comforted myself,' said Mrs. Ponsonby: 'I said things to him that I had longed to say, and how beautifully he took them! But I could not feel that he knew what he was about much better than he did the first time.'

'It would not be right,' said Mary, in her old tone.

'I think your father might have been persuaded. I would have written, and done my utmost—'

'Oh, mamma, anything rather than you should have that worry!'

'And I think things will be different—he is softened, and will be more so. But it is foolish to talk in this way, and it may be well that the trial should not be made; though that was not the reason I answered Louis as I did.'

'I suppose it will be Miss Conway,' said Mary, trying to smile.

'At least, it ought to be no one else till he has seen enough of her to form a judgment without the charm of prohibition; and this he may do without committing himself, as they are so nearly connected. I must ask his father to give him distinct permission, and then I shall have done with these things.'

Mary would not break the silence, nor recall her to earthly interests; but she returned to the subject, saying, wistfully, 'Can you tell me that you are content, dear child?'

'Quite content, thank you, mamma—I am certain it is right,' said Mary. 'It would be taking a wrong advantage of his compassion. I full too far short of what would be wanted to make him happy.'

She spoke firmly, but her eyes were full of tears. Her mother felt as if no one could fail of happiness with Mary, but, controlling the impulse, said, 'It is best, dearest; for you could not bear to feel yourself unable to make him happy or to fancy he might have more peace without you. My dear, your prospect is not all I could have wished or planned, but this would be too cruel.'

'It is my duty to go to papa,' said Mary. 'What would be selfish could not turn out well.'

'If you could be sure of his feelings—if he were only less strangely youthful— No,' she added, breaking off, as if rebuking herself, 'it is not to be thought of; but I do not wonder at you, my poor Mary—I never saw any one so engaging, nor in whom I could place such confidence.'

'I am so glad!' said Mary, gratefully. 'You used not to have that confidence.'

'I feared his being led. Now I feel as sure as any one can dare of his goodness. But I have been talking to him about self-reliance and consistency. He is so devoid of ambition, and so inert and diffident when not in an impetuous fit, that I dread his doing no good as well as no evil.'

Mary shook her head. Did she repress the expression of the sense that her arm had sometimes given him steadiness and fixed his aim?

'The resemblance to his mother struck me more than ever,' continued Mrs. Ponsonby. 'There is far more mind and soul, but almost the same nature—all bright, indolent sweetness, craving for something to lean on; but he shows what she might have been with the same principles. Dear boy! may he do well!'

'He will be very happy with Miss Conway,' said Mary. 'She will learn to appreciate all he says and does—her enthusiasm will spur him on. I shall hear of them.'

The unbreathed sigh seemed to be added to the weight of oppression on Mary's patient breast; but she kept her eye steady, her brow unruffled.

All the joys did indeed appear to be passing from her with her mother, and she felt as if she should never know another hour of gladness, nor of rest in full free open-hearted confidence; but she could not dwell either on herself or on the future, and each hour that her mother was spared to her was too precious to be wasted or profaned by aught that was personal.

Mrs. Ponsonby herself realized the weary soon to be at rest, the harassed well-nigh beyond the reach of troubling. She treated each earthly care and interest as though there were peace in laying it down for the last time. At intervals, as she was able, she wrote a long letter to her husband, to accompany the tidings of her death; and she held several conversations with Mary on her conduct for the future. She hoped much from Mary's influence, for Mr. Ponsonby was fond of his daughter, and would not willingly display himself in his worst colours before her; and Mary's steadiness of spirits and nerves might succeed, where her own liability to tears and trembling had always been a provocation. Her want of judgment in openly preferring her own relations to his uncongenial sister, had sown seeds of estrangement and discord which had given Mrs. Ponsonby some cause for self-reproach, and she felt great hope that her daughter would prevail where she had failed. There was little danger that he would not show Mary affection enough to make her home-duties labours of love; and at her age, and with her disposition, she could both take care of herself and be an unconscious restraint on her father. The trust and hope that she would be the means of weaning her father from evil, and bringing him home a changed man, was Mrs. Ponsonby's last bright vision.

As to scruples on Lord Ormersfield becoming Mary's escort on the voyage, Mrs. Ponsonby perceived his determination to be fixed beyond remonstrance. Perhaps she could neither regret that her daughter should have such a protector, nor bear to reject his last kindness; and she might have lingering hopes of the consequences of his meeting her husband, at a time when the hearts of both would be softened.

These matters arranged, she closed out the world. Louis saw her but once again, when other words than their own were spoken, and when the scene brought back to him a like one which had seemed his own farewell to this earth. His thread of life had been lengthened—here was the moment to pray that it might be strengthened. Firm purpose was wakening within him, and the battle-cry rang again in his ears—'Quit yourselves like men; be strong!'

His eye sought Mary. She looked, indeed, like one who could 'suffer and be strong.' Her brow was calm, though as if a load sat on her, borne too patiently to mar her peace. The end shone upon her, though the path might be hid in gloom: one step at a time was enough, and she was blest above all in her mother's good hope.

A hush was on them all, as though they were watching while a tired, overtaken child sank to rest.

There was a space of suffering, when Mary and Miss Mercy did all that love could do, and kept Mrs. Frost from the sight of what she could neither cheer nor alleviate, and when all she could do was to talk over the past with Lord Ormersfield.

Then came a brief interval of relief and consciousness, precious for ever to Mary's recollection. The last words of aught beneath were—'My dearest love to your father. Tell him I know now how much he has to forgive.'

The tender, impulsive, over-hasty spirit had wrought for itself some of the trials that had chastened and perfected it, even while breaking down the earthly tabernacle, so as to set free the weary soul, to enter into Rest!

CHAPTER XIX

MOONSHINE

He talked of daggers and of darts,
Of passions and of pains,
Of weeping eyes and wounded hearts,
Of kisses and of chains:
But still the lady shook her head,
And swore by yea and nay,
My whole was all that he had said,
And all that he could say.—W. MACKWORTH PRAED

MARY's strength gave way. She was calm and self-possessed as ever; she saw Lord Ormersfield, wrote to her aunt, made all necessary arrangements, and, after the funeral, moved to Mrs.

Frost's house. But, though not actually ill, she was incapable of exertion, could not walk up-stairs without fatigue ; and after writing a letter, or looking over papers, Aunt Catharine would find her leaning back, so wan and exhausted, that she could not resist being laid down to rest on the sofa.

She shrank from seeing any fresh face, and the effort of talking to the Earl resulted in such weariness and quiet depression that Mrs. Frost dared not press her to admit any one else, except Louis, who rode to the Terrace almost every day ; but when the kind aunt, believing there must be solace in the sight of her boy, begged to bring him in, Mary answered, with unusual vehemence, 'Pray don't : tell him I cannot see any one.' And when Mrs. Frost returned from a sorrowful talk with Louis, she believed that Mary had been weeping.

Louis was sad enough. Out of the few friend of his childhood he could ill afford to lose one, and he grieved much for his father, to whom the loss was very great. The Earl strove, in his old fashion, to stifle sorrow in letters of business, but could not succeed : the result was, that he would discuss the one Mary's past, and the other Mary's future, till time waxed so short that he gladly accepted his son's assistance. Conversations with Richardson and orders to Frampton devolved on Louis, and the desire to do no mischief caused him to employ his intellect in acquiring a new habit of attention and accuracy.

His reverence for Mary was doubled, and he was much concerned at his exclusion, attributing it to his mistimed proposals, and becoming sensible that he had acted boyishly and without due respect. With a longing desire to do anything for her, he dared not even send her a greeting, a flower, or a book, lest it should appear an intrusion ; and but for his mournful looks, his aunt would have been almost vexed at his so often preventing her from going to make another attempt to induce his cousin to see him.

Mary first roused herself on finding that Lord Ormersfield was taking it for granted that she would wait to hear from her father before sailing for Peru. The correspondence which had passed since her mother had begun to decline, had convinced her that he expected and wished for her without loss of time, and the vessel whose captain he chiefly trusted was to sail at the end of May. She entreated to be allowed to go alone, declaring that she had no fears, and would not endure that the Earl should double Cape Horn on her account ; but he stood fast—he would not be deprived of the last service that he could render to her mother, and he had not reliance enough on her father to let her go out without any guardian or friend.

Recent letters from Mr. Ponsonby and from Oliver Dynevore reiterated requests for an intelligent man conversant with mining operations, and Oliver had indicated a person whom he remembered at Cheveleigh ; but, as his mother said, he forgot that people grew old in the Eastern hemisphere, and the appli-

cation was a failure. Finding that Mary regarded it as her charge, Fitzjocelyn volunteered to go to Illershall to consult his friend Mr. Dobbs ; and his first meeting with Mary was spent in receiving business-like instructions as to the person for whom he should inquire.

There were some who felt dubious when he was seen walking back from the station with a young man who, in spite of broad-cloth and growth, was evidently Tom Madison.

'I could not help it, Mary,' said Louis ; 'it was not my fault that Dobbs would recommend him.'

Mr. Dobbs had looked this way and that, and concluded with, 'Well, Lord Fitzjocelyn, I do not know who would answer your purpose better than the young fellow you sent here a year ago.'

It appeared that Tom had striven assiduously both to learn his business and to improve himself ; and, having considerable abilities, already brightened and sharpened by Louis, his progress had been surprising. He had no low tastes, and was perfectly to be relied on for all essential points ; but Mr. Dobbs owned that he should be relieved by parting with him, as he was not liked by his fellows, and was thought by the foremen to give himself airs. Quarrels and misunderstandings had arisen so often, that he himself had been obliged to exert an influence on his behalf, which he feared might make him obnoxious to the accusation of partiality. He considered that the lad had worth, substance, and promise far beyond his fellows ; but his blunt, haughty manners, impatience of rough jokes, and rude avoidance of the unrefined, made him the object of their dislike, so that it was probable that he would thrive much better abroad and in authority ; and at his age, he was more likely to adapt himself to circumstances, and learn a new language, than an older man, more used to routine.

The vision of the land for digging gold and silver seemed about to be realized, just as Tom had been growing learned enough to despise it. Enterprise and hopes of fortune made him wild to go ; and Mary, after reading Dobbs's letter, and laying before Louis the various temptations of Lima, found that he thought England to the full as dangerous for his *protégé*. She, therefore, sent for the young man, and decided as dispassionately as she could, upon taking him.

The Ormersfield world was extremely indignant ; Frampton and Gervas prophesied that no good would come of such a choice, and marvelled at the Vicar, who gave the lad lodging in his house, and spent the evenings in giving him such mathematical instruction and teaching of other kinds, as he thought most likely to be useful to him.

To his surprise, however, Tom was much more grave and sober-minded under his promotion than could have been expected. Louis, who had undertaken his outfit, was almost disappointed to find him so much out of heart, and so little responsive to cheerful auguries ; and at last a little hint at

bantering about the individual at the Terrace explained his despondence.

It was all over. Charlotte had hardly spoken to him while he was waiting at No. 5, and Miss Faithfull's Martha had told him there had been nothing but walking and talking with Lady Conway's fine butler, and that Charlotte would never have nothing more to say to him! Now! Just as he might have spoken! Was it not enough to knock the heart out of it all? He never wished to go near No. 5 again.

Louis strongly advised him at least to know his fate, and declared that, for his part, he would never take any Mrs. Martha's word, rather than that of the lady herself. Speak out, and, of course, Montrose's famous motto came in, and was highly appreciated by Tom, though he still shook his head ruefully, as he recollected what a lout he had been at his last meeting with Charlotte, and how little he could compare with such a fine gentleman as had been described, 'And she always had a taste for gentility.'

'Well, Tom, I would not wish to see a better gentleman any day, than you have stuff enough in you to make; and, if Charlotte be a girl worth having, she'll value that more than French polish. You're getting polished, too, Tom, and will more as you get better and sounder, and that polish will be true and not French.'

Meantime Charlotte had been in twenty states of mind. Had Tom striven at once to return to the former terms, the Lady of Eschalott might have treated it as mere natural homage, compared him with Delaford's delicate flatteries, and disclaimed him. She had been chilling and shy at the first meeting, expecting him to presume on his promotion; but when he was gone, came no more, except for necessary interviews with Miss Ponsonby, and then merely spoke civilly, and went away directly, her heart began to fail her. Neglect mortified her; she was first affronted, sure she did not care, and resolved to show that she did not; but then the vexation became stronger; she wondered if he had heard of Delaford, was angry at her intercourse with the butler being deemed an offence, and finally arrived at a hearty longing for a return to old times. Vanity or affection, one or the other, demanded Tom's allegiance.

And Tom came at last. He did not come by moonlight—he did not come at all romantically; but as she was washing vegetables, he stood by the scullery door, and made no elegant circumlocutions. Would she be his wife, some time or other? and he would try to be worthy of her.

Fitzjocelyn had judged her rightly! Sound true love had force enough to dispel every illusion of sentimental flattery. Charlotte burst into a flood of tears, and, sobbing behind her apron, confessed that she never liked nobody like Tom; but she was afraid he would think she had been false to him, for she did like Mr. Delaford's talk, all about poetry and serenades;

but she never would heed him no more, not if he went down on his knees to her.

Tom was a great deal more likely to perform that feat.

He stood his ground when Mrs. Beckett came in, and told her all about it, and the good old soul mingled her tears with Charlotte's, wished them joy, and finished washing the greens. Nevertheless Mrs. Frost thought the kitchen-clock was very slow.

Their 'walking together' was recognized. Martha was very angry with Jane, and predicted that the young vagabone would never be heard of more; and that the only benefit would be, that it would settle the girl's mind, and hinder her from encouraging any more followers. And even Mrs. Frost had her doubts. Her prudent counsel interfered with Tom's wish to carry out poor little Charlotte as his wife; and they had to content themselves with a betrothal until they should have 'saved something,' exchanging brooches, each with a memorial lock of hair. During the remaining week, the Lady of Eschalott neither ate nor slept, and though she did her work, her tears never seemed to cease. She defended herself by averring that Miss Ponsonby's pillow was soaked every morning; but if Mary's heavy eyelids corroborated her, her demeanour did not. Mary was busy in dismantling the house and in packing up; speaking little, but always considerate and self-possessed, and resolute in avoiding all excitement of feeling. She would not go to Ormersfield, as the Earl proposed, even for one day; and a few books connected with the happy lessons of last summer, were given into Mrs. Frost's keeping, with the steady, calm words, 'I had better not take them.' She made no outpouring even to that universal, loving confidante, Aunt Catharine; and the final parting did not break down her self-restraint, though, as the last bend of her head was given, the last chimney of Northwold disappeared, her sensation of heartache almost amounted to sickening.

She was going to Bryanston Square. Her aunt had been as kind as possible, and had even offered to come to Northwold to fetch her home; but Mary had been too considerate to allow her to think of so dreadful a journey, and had, in fact, been glad to be left only to her own Aunt Catharine. The last letters which had passed between Mrs. Ponsonby and Aunt Melicent had been such as two sincere Christian women could not fail to write in such circumstances as must soften down all asperities, alleviate prejudice and variance, and be a prelude to that perfect unity when all misunderstandings shall end for ever; and thus Mary had the comfort of knowing that the two whom she loved so fondly, had parted with all mutual affection and cordial honour.

She really loved the little prim stiff figure who stood on the stairs to welcome her. The house had been her home for ten of the most home-forming years of her life, and felt familiar and kindly; it was very quiet, and it was an unspeakable comfort to be with one who talked freely of her father with

blind partiality and love, and did not oppress her with implied compassion for her return to him.

Yet Mary could not help now and then being sensible that good Aunt Melicent was not the fountain of wisdom which she used to esteem her. Now and then a dictum would sound narrow and questionable, objections to books seemed mistaken, judgments of people hard, and without sufficient foundation; and when Mary tried to argue, she found herself decidedly set down, with as much confident superiority as if she had been still sixteen years old. Six years spent in going to the other side of the world, and in seeing so many varieties of people, did not seem to Aunt Melicent to have conferred half so much experience as sleeping every night in Bryanston Square, daily reading the *Morning Post*, and holding intercourse with a London world of a dozen old ladies, three curates, and a doctor.

The worst of it was, that a hurt and angry tenderness was always excited in Mary's mind by the manner of any reference to Northwold or Ormersfield. It seemed to be fixed, beyond a doubt, that everything there must have been wrong and fashionable; and even poor dear Aunt Kitty was only spoken of with a charitable hope that affliction had taught her to see the error of her days of worldly display.

It was allowed that there was nothing objectionable in Clara Frost, who was subdued by the sight of Mary's deep mourning, and in silent formal company could be grave and formal too. But there was a severe shock in a call from Lady Conway and Isabel; and on their departure Mary was cross-examined, in the hope that they had been outrageously gay at Northwold, and for want of any such depositions, was regaled with histories of poor Lady Fitzjocelyn's vanities, which had not lost by their transmission through twenty-two years and twice as many mouths.

Still more unpleasant was the result of a visit from the Earl and his son to appoint the day of starting for Liverpool. Louis was in no mood to startle any one; he was very sad at heart, and only anxious to be inoffensive; but his air was quite enough to give umbrage, and cause the instant remark, 'I never saw such a puppy!'

Nothing but such angry incoherency occurred to Mary, that she forcibly held her peace, but could not prevent a burning crimson from spreading over her face. She went and stood at the window, glad that Miss Ponsonby had just taken up the newspaper, which she daily read from end to end, and then posted for Lima.

By and by came a little dry cough, as she went through the presentations at the levee, and read out 'Viscount Fitzjocelyn, by the Earl of Ormersfield.'

Mary's mind made an excursion to the dear Yeomanry suit, till her aunt, having further hunted them out among the Earls and Viscounts summed up at the end, severely demanded whether she had known of their intention.

‘I knew he was to be presented.’

‘Quite the young man of fashion. No doubt beginning *that* course, as if the estate were not sufficiently impoverished already. I am not surprised at the report that Lord Ormersfield was very anxious to secure your fortune for his son.’

This was too much, and Mary exclaimed, ‘He never believes in any fortune that depends on speculation.’

‘Oh, so there was nothing in it!’ said Miss Ponsonby, who would have liked the satisfaction of knowing that her niece had refused to be a countess; and, while Mary was debating whether her silence were untruthful, her bent head and glowing cheeks betrayed her. ‘Ah! my dear, I will ask no questions; I see you have been annoyed. It always happens when a girl with expectations goes among needy nobility.’

‘You would not say that, if you knew the circumstances,’ said Mary, looking down.

‘I won’t distress you, my dear; I know you are too wise a girl to be dazzled with worldly splendours, and that is enough for me.’

The poor old furniture at Ormersfield!

Mary held her tongue, though reproaching herself for cruel injustice to all that was dearest to her; but how deny her refusal, or explain the motives?

Not that her aunt wanted any explanation, except her own excellent training, which had saved her niece from partaking her mother’s infatuation for great people. She had a grand secret to pour into the bosom of her inmates in some *tête-à-tête* tea-party by and by; and poor Mary little guessed at the glorification of her prudence which was flowing from her aunt’s well-mended pen, in a long letter to Mr. Ponsonby. She thought it right that he should be informed, she said, that their dear Mary had conducted herself according to their fondest wishes; that the relations, among whom she had unfortunately been thrown, had formed designs on her fortune, such as they had every reason to expect; that every solicitation had been employed, but that Mary had withstood all that would have been most alluring to girls brought up to esteem mere worldly advantages. It was extremely gratifying, the more so as the young gentleman in question might be considered as strikingly handsome to the mere outward eye, which did not detect the stamp of frivolity, and the effect of an early introduction to the world of fashion and dissipation. She trusted that their dear young heiress would have a better fate, owing to her own wisdom, than being chosen to support the extravagance of a young titled adventurer.

Having worked herself up into enthusiastic admiration of her own work, Miss Ponsonby was kinder than ever to her niece, and pitied her for being harassed with Lord Fitzjocelyn’s company to Liverpool.

Mary was not as much relieved as she had expected, when

her hand had been released from his pressure, and she had seen the last glimpse of his returning boat.

Henceforth her imagination was to picture him only with Isabel Conway.

And so Viscount Fitzjocelyn was left with more liberty than he knew what to do with. He was disinclined to begin the pursuit of Miss Conway, as if this would involve a want of delicacy and feeling, and he had no other object. The world was before him, but when he drove to the Liverpool Station, he was unwilling to exert his mind to decide for what ticket to ask.

The bias was given by the recollection of a message from his father to Frampton. It would be less trouble to go home than to write, and, besides, Aunt Catharine was alone. She was his unflinching friend, and it would be a great treat to have her to himself.

Home then he went, where he spent the long summer days in listless, desultory, busy idleness ; often alone, dreaming over last year ; often passing his evenings with his aunt, or bringing her to see his designs ; dining out whenever he was invited, and returning odd uncertain answers when Mr. Calcott asked him what he was going to do.

Mr. Holdsworth was going to leave James in charge of his parish, and take a walking tour in Cornwall, and perversely enough, Louis's fancy fixed on joining him ; and was much disappointed when Mrs. Frost proved, beyond dispute, that an ankle which a little over-haste or fatigue always rendered lame, would be an unfair drag upon a companion, and that if he went at all, it must not be on his own feet.

At last, Lady Conway made a descent upon Northwold. Paris had become so tranquil that she had no hesitation in taking her two elder daughters to make their promised visit ; and such appeals were made to Louis to join them, that it became more troublesome to refuse than to comply, and, at the shortest notice, he prepared to set out as the escort of the Conway family.

'Now for it !' he thought. 'If she be the woman, I cannot fail to find it out, between the inns and the sights !'

Short as the notice was, the Lady of Eschalott could have wished it shorter. No sooner had Mr. Delaford set foot in the House Beautiful, than Mrs. Martha announced to him that he would be happy to hear that Charlotte Arnold was going to be married to a very respectable young man, whom she had known all his life, and to whom Mr. Dynevor and Miss Ponsonby had given an appointment to the gold mines, out of respect for Lord Fitzjocelyn. Mr. Delaford gravely declared himself glad to hear it.

But Delaford's purpose in life was, that no maiden should fail of being smitten with his charms ; and he took Charlotte's defection seriously to heart. His first free moment was devoted to a call in No. 5, but Charlotte was scouring in the upper

regions, and Mrs. Beckett only treated him to another edition of the gold mines, in which, if they became silver, the power and grandeur of Mr. Oliver were mightily magnified. Mr. Delaford thrummed his most doleful tunes on the guitar that evening, but though the June sun was sinking beautifully, Charlotte never put her head out. However, the third time, he found her, and then she was coy and blushing, reserved and distant, and so much prettier, and more genuine than all his former conquests, that something beyond vanity became interested.

He courted the Muses, and walked in with a pathetic copy of verses, which, some day or other, might serve to figure in the county newspaper, complaining of desertion and cruelty.

Charlotte sat at the little round table; Jane was up-stairs, and without her guardian, she felt that she must guard herself. He laid the verses down before her with a most piteous countenance.

'Please don't, Mr. Delaford,' she said; 'I asked Mrs. Beckett to tell you—'

'She has transfixed my breast,' was the commencement, and out poured a speech worthy of any hero of Charlotte's imagination, but it was not half so pleasant to hear as to dream of, and the utmost she could say was a reiteration of her 'please don't!'

At last she mustered courage to say, 'I can't listen, sir. I never ought to have done it. I am promised now, and I can't.'

A melodramatic burst of indignation frightened her nearly out of her senses, and happily brought Jane down. He was going the next day, but he returned once more to the charge, very dolorous and ill-used; but Charlotte had collected herself and taken counsel by that time. 'I never promised you anything, sir,' she said. 'I never knew you meant nothing.'

'Ah! Miss Arnold, you cannot interpret the heart!' and he put his hand upon it.

'Nor I don't believe you meant it, neither!' continued Charlotte, with spirit. 'They tell me 'tis the way you goes on with all young women as have the ill-luck to believe you; and that 'tis all along of your hard-heartedness that poor Miss Marianne looks so dwining.'

'When ladies will throw themselves at a gentleman's head, what can a poor man do? Courtesy to the sex is my motto; but never, never did I love as I love you!' said Delaford—'never have I spoken as I do now! My heart and hand are yours, fairest Charlotte!'

'For shame, Mr. Delaford; don't you know I am promised?'

He went on, disregarding—'My family is above my present situation, confidential though it be; but I would at once quit my present post—I would open an extensive establishment for refreshment at some fashionable watering-place. My connections could not fail to make it succeed. You should merely superintend—have a large establishment under you—and enjoy the society and amusements for which you are eminently fitted. We would have a library of romance and poetry—attend the

theatre weekly—and,—(finishing as if to clench the whole) ‘Charlotte, do you know what my property consists of? I have four hundred pounds and expectations!’

If Charlotte had not been guarded, what would have been the effect of the library of poetry and romance?

But her own poetry, romance, and honest heart, all went the same way, and she cried out—‘I don’t care what you have, not I. I’ve promised, and I’ll be true—get along with you!’

The village girl, hard pressed, was breaking out.

‘You bid me go. Cruel girl! your commands shall be obeyed. I go abroad! You know the disturbed state of the Continent.—In some conflict for liberty, where the desperate poniard is uplifted—there—’

‘Oh! don’t talk so dreadful. Pray—’

‘Do you bid me pause? At a word from you. You are the arbitress of my destiny.’

‘No; I’ve nothing to do—do go! Only promise you’ll not do nothing dangerous—’

‘Reject me, and life is intolerable. Where the maddened crowd rise upon their tyrants, there in thickest of the fray—’

‘You’ll be the first to take to your heels, I’ll be bound! Ain’t you ashamed of yourself, to be ranting and frightening a poor girl that fashion?’ cried the friendly dragon Martha, descending on them.

‘Do you apply that language to me, ma’am?’

‘That I do! and richly you deserve it, too, sir! See if your missus doesn’t hear of your tricks, if I find you at this again.’

The ‘sex’ fairly scolded the courteous Delaford off the field; and though she turned her wrath on Charlotte for having encouraged him, and wondered what the poor young man over the seas would think of it, her interposition had never been so welcome. Charlotte cried herself into tranquillity, and was only farther disturbed by a dismal epistle, conveyed by the shoe-boy on the morning of departure, breathing the language of despair, and yet announcing that she had better think twice of the four hundred pounds and expectations, for that it was her destiny that she and no other should be the bride of Delaford.

‘If I could only know he would do nothing rash!’ sighed Charlotte.

Jane comforted her; Martha held that he was the last man in the world who would do anything rash. Miss Conway’s Marianne, who was left behind, treated Charlotte as something ignominious, but looked so ill, miserable, and pining, that Miss Mercy was persuaded she was going into a decline, and treated her with greater kindness than she had met since she was a child.

In the meantime, Fitzjocelyn had begun with a fit of bashfulness. The knowledge that this was the crisis, and that all his friends looked to the result of the expedition, made him feel as if he were committing himself whenever he handed Isabel in or out of a carriage, and find no comfort except in Virginia’s chattering.

This wore off quickly ; the new scene took effect on his impressive mind, and the actual sights and sounds drove out all the rest. His high spirits came back, he freely hazarded Mrs. Frost's old boarding-school French, and laughed at the infinite blunders for which Virginia took him to task, was excessively amused at Delaford's numerous adventures, and enjoyed everything to the utmost. To Miss Conway he turned naturally as the person best able to enter into the countless associations of every scene ; and Isabel, becoming aware of his amount of knowledge, and tone of deep thought, perceived that she had done Mr. Frost Dynevor injustice in believing his friendship blind or unmerited.

They were on most comfortable terms. They had walked all over Versailles together, and talked under their breath of the murdered Queen ; they had been through the Louvre, and Isabel, knowing it well of old, found all made vivid and new by his enthusiastic delight ; they had marvelled together at the poor withered 'popular trees,' whose name had conferred on them the fatal distinction of trees of liberty ; they had viewed, like earnest people, the scenes of republican Paris, and discussed them with the same principles, but with sufficient difference in detail for amicable argument. They had thought much of things and people, and not at all of each other.

Only Isabel thought she would make the Viscount into a Vidame, both as more quaint and less personal, and involving but slight erasures, and Louis was surprised to find what was the true current of his thoughts. With Isabel propitious, without compunction in addressing her, with all the novelty and amusement before him, he found himself always recurring to Mary, trying all things by Mary's judgment, wondering whether he should need approval of his theories in Mary's eyes, craving Mary's sympathies, following her on her voyage, and imagining her arrival. Was it the perverse spirit of longing after the most unattainable ?

He demanded of himself whether it were a fatal sign that he regretted the loss of Isabel, when she went to spend a few days with her old governess. Miss Longman had left the Conway family in order to take care of the motherless children of a good-for-nothing brother, who had run too deeply into debt to be able to return to England. He was now dead, but she was teaching English, and obtaining advantages of education for her nieces, which detained her at Paris ; and as she had a bed to offer her former pupil, Isabel set her heart on spending her last three days in the unrestrained intercourse afforded by a visit to her. Louis found that though their party had lost the most agreeable member, yet it was not the loss of the sun ; and that he was quite as ready to tease his aunt and make Virginia laugh, as if Isabel had been looking on with a smile of wonder and commiseration for their nonsense.

CHAPTER XX

THE FANTASTIC VISCOUNT

Search for a jewel that too casually
 Hath left mine arm: it was thy master's. Shrew me
 If I would lose it for a revenue
 Of any king's in Europe!—*Cymbeline.*

'My dear Fitzjocelyn, what is to be done? Have you heard? Delaford says these horrid creatures are rising! There was an attack on the Hotel de Ville last night! A thousand people killed, at least!—The National Guard called out!'

'One of the lions of Paris, my dear aunt; Virginia is seeing it in style.'

'Seeing it! We must go at once. They will raise those horrid barricades;—we shall be closed in. And Isabel gone to that governess! I wish I had never consented! How could I come here at all? Fitzjocelyn, what is to be done?'

'Drive round that way, if you are bent on going,' said Louis, coolly. 'Meantime, Virginia, my dear, I will thank you for some coffee.'

'How can you talk of such things?' cried his aunt. 'It is all those savage wretches, mad because the national workshops are closed. Delaford declares they will massacre all the English.'

'Poor wretches, I believe they are starving. I think your making yourself ill the most pressing danger. Come, Virginia, persuade your mamma to sit down to breakfast, while I go to reconnoitre. Where are the passports?'

Virginia had lost all terror in excitement, but neither she nor her mother could bear to let him go out, to return they knew not when. The carriage had already been ordered, but Lady Conway was exceedingly frightened at the notion of driving anywhere but direct to the railway station; she was sure that they should encounter something frightful if they went along the Boulevards.

'Could not Delaford go to fetch Isabel?' suggested Virginia; 'he might take a carriage belonging to the hotel.'

Delaford was summoned, and desired to go to fetch Miss Conway, but though he said, 'Yes, my lady,' he looked yellow and white, and loitered to suggest whether the young lady would not be alarmed.

'I will go with you,' said Louis. 'Order the carriage, and I shall be ready.'

Lady Conway, to whom his presence seemed protection, was almost remonstrating, but he said, 'Delaford is in no state to be of use. He would take *bon-jour* for a challenge. Let me go with him, or he will take care the young lady is alarmed. When we are all together, we can do as may seem best, and I shall be able better to judge whether we are to fight or fly.'

Outside the door he found Delaford, who begged to suggest to his lordship that my lady would be alarmed if she were left without either of them ; he could hardly answer it to himself that she should remain without any male protector.

'Oh, yes, pray remain to defend her,' said Louis, much amused, and hastening down-stairs he ordered the carriage to drive to Rue —, off the Boulevard St. Martin.

He thought there were signs boding tempest. Shops were closed, and men in blouses were beginning to assemble in knots—here and there the red-cap loomed ominously in the far end of narrow alleys, and in the wider streets the only passengers either seemed in haste like himself, or else were National Guards hurrying to their alarm-post.

He came safely to Miss Longman's apartments, where he found all on the alert—the governess and her nieces recounting their experiences of February, which convinced them that there was more danger in returning than in remaining. Miss Longman was urgent to keep Isabel and Lord Fitzjocelyn for at least a few hours, which she declared would probably be the duration of any *émeute*, but they knew this would cause dreadful anxiety, and when Fitzjocelyn proposed returning alone, Isabel insisted on accompanying him, declaring that she had no fears, and that her mother would be miserable if her absence should detain them. Perhaps she was somewhat deceived by the cool, almost ludicrous, light in which he placed the revolution, as a sort of periodical spasm ; and Miss Longman's predictions that the railway would be closed, only quickened her preparations.

After receiving many entreaties to return in case of alarm, they took leave, Louis seating himself beside the driver, as well to keep a look-out, as to free Miss Conway from fears of a *tête-à-tête*. Except for such a charge of ladies, he would have been delighted at the excitement of an *émeute* ; but he was far from guessing how serious a turn affairs were taking.

The dark blue groups were thickening into crowds ; muskets and pikes were here and there seen, and once he recognized the sinister red flag. A few distant shots were heard, and the driver would gladly have hastened his speed, but swarms of haggard-looking men began to impede their progress, and strains of *Mourir pour la patrie* now and then reached their ears.

Close to the Porte St. Denis they were brought to a full stop by a dense throng, above whose heads were seen a line of carriages, the red flag planted on the top. Many hands were seizing the horses' heads, and Louis leapt down, but not before the door had been opened, and voices were exclaiming, *Descendez, citoyenne ; au nom de la nation, descendez*. The mob were not uncivil ; they made way for Louis, and bade him reassure her that no harm was intended, but the carriage was required for the service of the nation.

Isabel had retreated as far as she could from their hands, but she showed no signs of quailing ; her eyes were bright, her

colour high, and the hand was firm which she gave to Louis as she stepped out. There was a murmur of admiration, and more than one bow and muttered apology about necessity and the nation, as the crowd beheld the maiden in all her innate nobleness and dignity.

'Which way?' asked Louis, finding that the crowd were willing to let them choose their course.

'Home,' said Isabel, decidedly; 'there is no use in turning back.'

They pressed on past the barricade for which their carriage had been required, a structure of confiscated vehicles, the interstices filled up with earth and paving-stones, which men and boys were busily tearing up from the trottoirs, and others carrying to their destination. They were a gaunt, hungry, wolfish-looking race; and the first words that Isabel spoke were words of pity, when they had passed them, and continued their course along the Boulevards, here in desolate tranquillity. 'Poor creatures, they look as if misery made them furious; and yet how civil they were.'

'Were you much alarmed? I wish I could have come to you sooner.'

'Thank you; I knew that you were at hand, and their address was not very terrific, poor things. I do not imagine there was any real danger.'

'I wish I knew whether we are within or without the barricades. If within, we shall have to cross another. We are actually becoming historical!'

He broke off, amazed by Isabel's change of countenance, as she put her hand to the arm he held, hastily withdrew it, and exclaimed, 'My bracelet! oh, my bracelet!' turning round to seek it on the pavement.

'The ivory clasp?' asked Louis, perceiving its absence.

'Oh yes!' she cried, in much distress, 'I would not have lost it for all the world.'

'You may have left it at Miss Longman's.'

'No, no, I was never without it!'

She turned, and made a few retrograde steps, searching on the ground, as if conscious only of her loss; shaking off his hand when he touched her arm to detain her.

A discovery broke on him. Well that he could bear it!

'Hark!' he said, 'there is cannon firing! Miss Conway, you cannot go back. I will do my utmost to recover your clasp, but we must not stay here.'

'I had forgotten. I beg your pardon, I did not think!' said Isabel, with a species of rebuked submission, as if impressed by the calmness that gave authority to his manner; and she made no remark as he made her resume his arm, and hurried her on past houses with closed doors and windows.

Suddenly there was the sound of a volley of musketry far behind. 'Heaven help the poor wretches,' said Louis; and Isabel's grasp tightened on his arm.

Again, again—the dropping sound of shot became continual. And now it was in front as well as in the rear; and the booming of cannon resounded from the heart of the city. They were again on the outskirts of a crowd.

‘It is as I thought,’ said Louis, ‘we are between both. There is nothing for it but to push on, and see whether we can cross the barricades; are you afraid to encounter it?’

‘No,’ said Isabel.

‘There is a convent not far off, I think. We might find shelter for you there. Yet they might break in. It might not be easy to meet. I believe you are safer with me. Will you trust in me?’

‘I will not have you endanger yourself for me. Dispose of me as you will—in a convent, or anywhere. Your life is precious; your safety is the first thing.’

‘You are speaking in irony.’

‘I did not mean it: I beg your pardon.’ But she coloured and faltered. ‘You must distinctly understand that this is only as Englishman to Englishwoman.’

‘As Englishman to Englishwoman,’ repeated Louis, in her own formula. ‘Or rather,’ he added, lowering his voice, ‘trust me, for the sake of those who gave the clasp.’

He was answered by her involuntary pressure of his arm, and finally, to set her at ease, he said, hurriedly, ‘If it went wrong with me, it would be to Lima that I should ask you to send my love.’

There was no time for more. They were again on the freshly-torn ground, whence the pavement had been wrenched. The throng had thickened behind them, and seemed to be involving them in the vortex. Above their heads Louis could see in front, between the tall houses, the summit of another barricade complete, surmounted with the red flag, and guarded by a fierce party of ruffians.

All at once, tremendous yells broke out on all sides. The rattle of a drum, now and then, might be distinguished; shouts and shrieks resounded, and there was a sharp fire of musketry from the barricade, and from the adjoining windows; there was a general rush to the front, and Louis could only guard Isabel by pressing her into the recess of the closed doorway of one of the houses, and standing before her, preventing himself from being swept away only by exerting all his English strength against the lean, wild beings who struggled past him, howling and screaming. The defenders sprang upon the barricade, and thrust back and hurled down the National Guards, whose heads were now and then seen as they vainly endeavoured to gain the summit. This desperate struggle lasted for a few minutes, then cries of victory broke out, and there was sharp firing on both sides, which, however, soon ceased; the red flag and the blouses remaining still in possession. Isabel had stood perfectly silent and motionless through the whole crisis, and though she clung

to her protector's arm, it was not with nervous disabling terror, even in the frightful tumult of the multitude. There was some other strength with her !

'You are not hurt ?' said Louis, as the pressure relaxed.

'Oh no ! thank God ! You are not ?'

'Are you ready ? We must make a rush before the next assault.'

A lane opened in the throng to afford passage for the wounded. Isabel shrank back, but Louis drew her on hastily, till they had attained the very foot of the barricade, where a space was kept clear, and there was a cry, '*Au large*, or we shall fire.'

'Let us pass, citizens,' said Louis, hastily rehearsing the French he had been composing. 'You make not war on women. Let me take this young lady to her mother.'

Grim looks were levelled at them by the fierce black-bearded men, and their mutterings of *belle* made her cling the closer to her guardian.

'Let her pass, the poor child !' said more than one voice.

'*Hein !*—they are English, who take the bread out of our mouths.'

'If you were a political economist,' said Louis, gravely, fixing his eyes on the shrewd-looking, sallow speaker, 'I would prove to you your mistake ; but I have no time, and you are too good fellows to wish to keep this lady here, a mark for the Garde Nationale.'

'He is right there,' said several of the council of chiefs, and a poissarde, with brawny arms and a tall white cap, thrusting forward, cried out, 'Let them go, the poor children. What are they doing here ? They look fit to be set up in the church for waxen images ?'

'Take care you do not break us,' exclaimed Louis, whose fair cheek had won this tribute ; and his smile, and the readiness of his reply, won his admission to the first of the steps up the barricade.

'*Halte là !*' cried a large-limbed, formidable-looking ruffian on the summit, pointing his musket towards them ; 'none passes here who does not bring a stone to raise our barricade for the rights of the Red Republic, and cry *La liberté, l'égalité, et la fraternité*, let it fit his perfidious tongue as it may.'

'There's my answer,' said Louis, raising his right arm, which was dripping with blood, 'you have made me mount the red flag !'

'Ha !' cried the friendly fishwife, 'wounded in the cause of the nation ! Let him go.'

'He has not uttered the cry !' shouted the rest.

Louis looked round with his cool, pensive smile. 'Liberty !' he said, 'what *we* mean by liberty is freedom to go where we will, and say what we will. I wish you had it, my poor fellows. Fraternity—it is not shooting our brother. Equality—I preach that too, but in my own fashion, not yours. Let me pass—*si celd vous est égal*.'

His nonchalant intrepidity—a quality never lost on the French—raised an acclamation of *le brave Anglais*. No one stirred to hinder their mounting to the banquette, and several hands were held out to assist in surmounting the parapet of this extemporary fortification. Isabel bowed her thanks, and Louis spoke them with gestures of courtesy; and shouts of high applause followed them as they sped along the blood-stained street.

The troops were re-forming after the repulse, and the point was to pass before the attack could be renewed, as well as not to be mistaken for the insurgents.

They were at once challenged, but a short explanation to the officer was sufficient, and they were suffered to turn into the Rue Richelieu, where they were only pursued by the distant sounds of warfare.

‘Oh, Lord Fitzjocelyn!’ cried Isabel, as he slackened his pace, and gasped for breath.

‘You are sure you are not hurt?’ he said.

‘Oh no, no; but you—’

‘It is very little,’ he said—‘a stray shot—only enough to work on their feelings. What good-natured rogues they were. I will only twist my handkerchief round to stop the blood. Thank you.’

Isabel tried to help him, but she was too much afraid of hurting him to draw the bandage tight.

They dashed on, finding people on the watch for tidings, and meeting bodies of the National Guard; and when at length they reached the Place Vendôme, they found the whole establishment watching for them, and Virginia flew to meet them on the stairs, throwing her arms round her sister, while Lady Conway started forward with the agitated joy, and almost anger, of one who felt injured by the fright they had made her suffer.

‘There you are! What has kept you? Delaford said they were slaughtering every one on the Boulevards!’

‘I warned you of the consequences of taking me,’ said Louis, dropping into a chair.

‘Mamma! he is all over blood!’ screamed Virginia.

Lady Conway recoiled, with a slight shriek.

‘It is a trifle,’ said Louis; ‘Isabel is safe. There is all cause for thankfulness. We could never have got through if she had not been every inch a heroine.’

‘Oh, Lord Fitzjocelyn, if I could thank you!’

‘Don’t,’ said Louis, with so exactly his peculiar droll look and smile, that all were reassured.

Isabel began to recount their adventure.

‘In the midst of those horrid wretches! and the firing!’ cried Lady Conway. ‘My dear, how could you bear it? I should have died of fright!’

‘There was no time for fear,’ said Isabel, with a sort of scorn; ‘I should have been ashamed to be frightened when Lord

Fitzjocelyn took it so quietly. I was only afraid lest you should repeat their horrid war-cry. I honour your refusal.

'Of course one would not in their sense, poor things, and on compulsion,' said Louis, his words coming the slower from the exhaustion which made him philosophize, rather than exert himself. 'In a true sense, it is the war-cry of our life.'

'How can you talk so!' cried Lady Conway. 'Delaforde says the ruffians are certain to overpower the Guard. We must go directly. Very likely this delay of yours may prevent us from getting off at all.'

'I will find out whether the way be open,' said Louis, 'when I have—'

His words failed him, for as he rose, the handkerchief slipped off, a gush of blood came with it, and he was so faint that he could hardly reach the sofa.

Lady Conway screamed, Virginia rang the bells, Isabel gave orders that a surgeon should be called.

'Spirits from the vasty deep,' muttered Louis, in the midst of his faintness; 'the surgeons have graver work on hand.'

'For heaven's sake, don't talk so!' cried his aunt, without daring to look at him; 'I know your arm is broken!'

'Broken bones are a very different matter, *experto crede*. This will be all right when I can stop the bleeding,' and steadying himself with difficulty, he reached the door, and slowly repaired to his own room, while the girls sent Fanshawe and Delaforde to his assistance.

Lady Conway, unable to bear the sight of blood, was in a state of nervous sobbing, which Virginia's excited restlessness did not tend to compose; and Isabel walked up and down the room, wishing that she could do anything, looking reproachfully at her mother, and exalting to the skies the courage, presence of mind, and fortitude of the wounded knight.

Presently, Delaforde came down with a message from Lord Fitzjocelyn that it was of no use to wait for him, for, as the butler expressed it, 'the hæmorrhage was pertinacious,' and he begged that the ladies would depart without regard to him. 'In fact,' said Delaforde, 'it was a serious crisis, and there was no time to be lost; an English gentleman, Captain Lonsdale, who had already offered his services, would take care of his lordship, and my lady had better secure herself and the young ladies.'

'Leave Fitzjocelyn!' cried Virginia.

'Is it very dangerous, Delaforde?' asked Lady Conway.

'I would not be responsible for the consequences of remaining, my lady,' was the answer. 'Shall I order the horses to be brought out?'

'I don't know. Is the street full of people! Oh! there is firing! What shall I do? Isabel, what do you say?'

Isabel was sitting still and upright; she hardly raised her eyelids, as she tranquilly said, 'Nothing shall induce me to go till he is better.'

'Isabel! this is most extraordinary! Do you know what you are saying?'

Isabel did not weaken her words by repetition, but signed to Delaford to leave them, and he never ventured to disregard Miss Conway. Virginia hung about her, and declared that she was quite right; and Lady Conway, in restless despair, predicted that they would all be massacred, and that her nephew would bleed to death, and appealed to every one on the iniquity of all the doctors in Paris for not coming near him.

Poor Louis himself was finding it very forlorn to be left to Fanshawe, whose one idea was essences, and Delaford, who suggested nothing but brandy. Some aunts and cousins he had, who would not have left him to their tender mercies. He was growing confused and feeble, speculating upon arteries, and then starting from a delusion of Mary's voice to realize his condition, and try to awaken his benumbed faculties.

At last, a decided step was heard, and he saw standing by him a vigorous, practical-looking Englishman, and a black-eyed, white-hooded little *Sœur de Charité*.

Captain Lonsdale, on hearing the calls for surgical aid, had, without a word, hurried out and secured the brisk little Sister, who, with much gesticulation, took possession of the arm, and pronounced it a mere trifle, which would have been nothing but for the loss of blood, the ball having simply passed through the fleshy part of the arm, avoiding the bone. Louis, pleased with this encounter as a result of the adventure, was soon in condition to rise, though with white cheeks and tottering step, and to present to Lady Conway her new defender.

The sight of a bold, lively English soldier was a grand consolation, even though he entirely destroyed all plans of escape by assuring her that there was a tremendous disturbance in the direction of the Northern Railway, and that the only safe place for ladies was, just where she was. He made various expeditions to procure intelligence, and his tidings were cheerful enough to counteract the horrible stories that Delaford was constantly bringing in throughout that Saturday, the dreadful 24th of June, 1848.

It was late before any one ventured to go to bed; and Louis, weak and weary, had wakened many times from dreamy perceptions that some wonderful discovery had been made, always fixing it upon Mary, and then finding himself infinitely relieved by recollecting that it did not regard her. He was in the full discomfort of the earlier stage of this oft-repeated vision, when his door was pushed open, and Delaford's trembling voice exclaimed, 'My lord, I beg your pardon, the massacre is beginning.'

'Let me know when it is over,' said Louis, nearly in his sleep.

Delaford reiterated that the city was bombarded, thousands of armed men were marching on the hotel, and my lady ought to be informed. A distant cannonade, the trampling of many feet, and terrified voices on the stairs, finally roused Louis,

and hastily rising, he quitted his room, and found all the ladies on the alert. Lady Conway was holding back Virginia from the window, and by turns summoning Isabel to leave it, and volubly entreating the master of the hotel to secure it with feather-beds to defend them from the shot.

'Oh, Fitzjocelyn!' she screamed, 'tell him so—tell him to take us to the cellars. Why will he not put the mattresses against the windows before they fire?'

'I should prefer a different relative position for ourselves and the beds,' said Louis, in his leisurely manner, as he advanced to look out. 'These are the friends of order, my dear aunt; you should welcome your protectors. Their beards and their bayonets by gaslight are a grand military spectacle.'

'They will fire! There will be fighting here! They will force their way in. Don't, Virginia—I desire you will not go near the window.'

'We are all right. You are as safe as if you were in your own drawing-room,' said Captain Lonsdale, walking in, and with his loud voice drowing the panic that Louis's cool, gentle tones only irritated.

Isabel looked up and smiled, as Louis stood by her, leaving his aunt and Virginia to the martial tones of their consoler.

'I could get no one to believe me when I said it was only the soldiers,' she observed, with some secret amusement.

'The feather-bed fortress was the leading idea,' said Louis. 'Some ladies have a curious pseudo presence of mind.'

'Generally, I believe,' said Isabel, 'a woman's presence of mind should be to do as she is told, and not to think for herself, unless she be obliged.'

'Thinking for themselves has been fatal to a good many,' said Louis, relapsing into meditation—'this poor Paris among the rest, I fancy. What a dawn for a Sunday morning! How cold the lights look, and how yellow the gas burns. We may think of home, and be thankful!' and kneeling with one knee on a chair, he leant against the shutter, gazing out and musing aloud.

'Thankful, indeed!' said Isabel, thoughtfully.

'Yes—first it was thinking not at all, and then thinking not in the right way.'

Isabel readily fell into the same strain. 'They turned from daylight and followed the glare of their own gas,' said she.

So they began a backward tracing of the calamities of France; and, as Louis's words came with more than usual slowness and deliberation, they had only arrived at Cardinal de Richelieu, when Captain Lonsdale exclaimed, 'I am sorry to interrupt you, Lord Fitzjocelyn, but may I ask whether you can afford to lose any more blood?'

'Thank you; yes, the bandage is loosened, but I was too comfortable to move,' said Louis, sleepily, and he reeled as he made the attempt, so that he could not have reached his room without support.

The Captain had profited sufficiently by the Sister's example to be able to stanch the blood, but not till the effusion had exhausted Louis so much that all the next day it mattered little to him that the city was in a state of siege, and no one allowed to go out or come in. Even a constant traveller like Captain Lonsdale, fertile in resource, and undaunted in search of all that was to be seen, was obliged to submit, the more willingly that Fitzjocelyn needed his care, and the ladies' terror was only kept at bay by his protection. He sat beside the bed where lay Louis in a torpid state, greatly disinclined to be roused to attend when his aunt would hasten into the room, full of some horrible rumour brought in by Delaford, and almost petulant because he would not be alarmed. All he asked of the Tricolor or of the Drapeau Rouge for the present was to let him alone, and he would drop into a doze again, while the Captain was still arguing away her terror.

More was true than he would allow her to credit ; and when the little *Sœur de Charité* found a few minutes for visiting her patient's wound, her bright face was pale with horror and her eyes red with weeping.

'Our good Archbishop !' she sobbed, when she allowed herself to speak, and to give way to a burst of tears. 'Ah, the martyr ! Ah, the good pastor ! The miserable—but no—my poor people, they knew not what they did !'

And as Louis, completely awakened, questioned her, she told how the good Archbishop Affre had begun that Sunday of strife and bloodshed by offering his intercessions at the altar for the unhappy people, and then offering his own life. 'The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep,' were his words, as he went forth to stand between the hostile parties, and endeavour to check their fury against one another. She herself had seen him, followed by a few priests, and preceded by a brave and faithful *ouvrier*, who insisted on carrying before him a green branch, as an emblem of his peaceful mission. She described how, at the sight of his violet robes, and the white cross on his breast, the brave boy *gardes mobiles* came crowding round him, all black with powder, begging for his blessing ; some reminding him that he had confirmed them, while others cried, 'Your blessing on our muskets, and we shall be invincible,' while some of the women asked him to carry the bandages and lint which they wished to send to the wounded.

On he went, comforting the wounded, absolving the dying, and exhorting the living, and at more than one scene of conflict the combatants paused, and yielded to his persuasions ; but at the barricade at the Faubourg St. Antoine, while he was signing to the mob to give him a moment to speak, a ball struck him, and followed by the weeping and horror-struck insurgents, he was borne into the curate's house, severely wounded, while the populace laid down their weapons, to sign a declaration that they knew not who had fired the fatal shot.

‘No, no ; it was none of our people !’ repeated the little nun. ‘Not one of them, poor lost creatures as too many are, would have committed the act—so sacrilegious, so ungrateful ! Ah ! you must not believe them wicked. It is misery that drove them to rise. Hold ! I met a young man—alas ! I knew him well when he was a child—I said to him, “Ah ! my son, you are on the bad train.” “Bread, mother—it is bread we must have,” he answered. “Why would you speak to one who has not eaten for twenty-four hours ?” I told him he knew the way to our kitchen. “No, mother,” he said, “I shall not eat ; I shall get myself killed.”’

Many a lamentable detail of this description did she narrate, as she busied herself with the wound ; and Louis listened, as he had listened to nothing else that day, and nearly emptied his travelling purse for the sufferers. Isabel and Virginia waylaid her on the stairs to admire and ask questions, but she firmly, though politely, put them aside, unable to waste any time away from her children—her poor wounded !

On Monday forenoon tranquillity was restored, the rabble had been crushed, and the organized force was triumphant. Still the state of siege continued, and no one was allowed free egress or ingress, but the Captain pronounced this all nonsense, and resolutely set out for a walk, taking the passports with him, and promising Lady Conway to arrange for her departure.

By and by he came in, subdued and affected by the procession which he had encountered—the dying Archbishop borne home to his palace on a litter, carried by workmen and soldiers, while the troops, who lined the streets, paid him their military salutes, and the people crowded to their doors and windows—one voice of weeping and mourning running along Paris—as the good prelate lay before their eyes, pale, suffering, peaceful, and ever and anon lifting his feeble hand for a last blessing to the flock for whom he had devoted himself.

The Captain was so much impressed that, as he said, he could not get over it, and stayed for some time talking over the scene with the young ladies, before starting up, as if wondering at his own emotion, he declared that he must go and see what they would do next.

Presently afterwards, Fitzjocelyn came down-stairs. His aunt was judiciously lying down in her own apartment to recruit her nerves after her agitation, and had called Virginia to read to her, and Isabel was writing her journal, alone, in the sitting-room. Lady Conway would have been gratified at her eager reception of him ; but, as he seemed very languid, and indisposed for conversation, she continued her occupation, while he rested in an arm-chair.

Presently he said, ‘Is it possible that you could have left that bracelet at Miss Longman’s ?’

‘Pray do not think about it,’ exclaimed Isabel ; ‘I am ashamed of my childishness ! Perhaps, but for that delay, you would not

have been hurt,' and her eyes filled with tears, as her fingers encircled the place where the bracelet should have been.

'Perhaps, but for that delay, we might both have been shot,' said Louis. 'No, indeed; I could not wonder at your prizing it so much.'

'I little thought that would be the end of it,' said Isabel. 'I am glad you know its history, so that I may have some excuse;' and she tried to smile, but she blushed deeply as she dried her eyes.

'Excuse? more than excuse!' said Louis, remembering his fears that it would be thrown away upon her. 'I know—'

'He has told you!' cried Isabel, starting with bashful eagerness.

'He has told me what I understand *now*,' said Louis, coming near in a glow of grateful delight. 'Oh, I am so glad you appreciate him. Thank you.'

'You are inferring too much,' said Isabel, turning away in confusion.

'Don't you mean it!' exclaimed Louis. 'I thought—'

'We must not mistake each other,' said Isabel, recovering her self-possession. 'Nothing amounting to what you mean ever passed, except a few words the last evening, and I may have dwelt on them more than I ought,' faltered she, with averted head.

'Not more than he has done, I feel certain,' said Louis; 'I see it all! Dear old Jem! there's no such fellow in existence.' But here perceiving that he was going too far, he added, almost timidly, 'I beg your pardon.'

'You have no occasion,' she said, smiling in the midst of her blushes. 'I feared I had said what I ought not. I little expected such kind sympathy.'

She hastily left him, and Lady Conway soon after found him so full of bright, half-veiled satisfaction, that she held herself in readiness for a confession from one or both every minute, and, now that the panic was over, gave great credit to the Red Republicans for having served her so effectually, and forgave the young people for having been so provoking in their coolness in the time of danger, since it proved how well they were suited to each other. She greatly enjoyed the universally-implied conviction with regard to the handsome young pair. Nor did they struggle against it; neither of them made any secret of their admiration for the conduct of the other, and the scrupulous appellations of Miss Conway and Lord Fitzjocelyn were discarded for more cousinly titles.

The young hero fell somewhat in his aunt's favour when he was missing at the travellers' early breakfast, although Delaford reported him much better and gone out. 'What if he should be late for the train?—what if he should be taken up by the police?' Virginia scolded her sister for not being equally restless, and had almost hunted the Captain into going in search of him; when at last, ten minutes before the moment of departure, in

he came, white, lame, and breathless, but his eyes dancing with glee, and his lips archly grave, as he dropped something into Isabel's lap.

'Her bracelet !' exclaimed Virginia, as Isabel looked up with swimming eyes, unable to speak. 'Where did you find it ?'

'In the carriage, in the heart of the barricade at the Porte St. Denis.'

'It is too much !' cried Isabel, recovering her utterance, and rising with her hands locked together in her emotion. 'You make me repent my having lamented for it !'

'I had an old respect for Clara's clasp.'

'I never saw a prettier attention,' said his aunt. 'It is only a pity that you cannot fasten it on for her.'

'That could only be done by the *right* hand,' muttered Louis, under his breath, enjoying her blush.

'You have not told us how you got it ?' said Virginia.

'It struck me that there was a chance, and I had promised to lose none. I found the soldiers in the act of pulling down the barricade. What an astonishing construction it is ! I spoke to the officer, who was very civil, and caused me to depose that I had hired the carriage, and belonged to the young lady. I believed my sling had a great effect ; for they set up a shout of acclamation when the bracelet appeared, lying on the cushion as quietly as if it were in its own drawer.'

'The value will be greater than ever *now*, Isabel,' said Lady Conway. 'You will never lose it again !'

Isabel did not gainsay her.

The Captain shrugged his shoulders, and looked sagacious at his patient's preparation for the journey before him.

Louis gravely looked into his face as he took leave of him, and said, 'You are wrong.'

The Captain raised his eyebrows incredulously.

As they left the city, the bells of all the churches were tolling for the martyred Archbishop. And not for him alone was there mourning and lamentation through the city : death and agony were everywhere ; in some of the streets, each house was a hospital, and many a groan and cry of mortal pain was uttered through that fair summer day. Louis, in a low voice, reminded Isabel that, on this same day, the English primate was consecrating the abbey newly restored for a missionary college ; and his eyes glistened as he dwelt with thanksgiving upon the contrast, and thought of the 'peace within our walls, and plenteousness within our palaces.'

He lay back in his corner of the carriage, too much tired to talk ; though, by and by, he began to smile over his own musings, or to make some lazily ludicrous remark to amuse Virginia. His aunt caressed her wounded hero, and promoted his intercourse with Isabel, to his exquisite amusement, in his passive, *debonnaire* condition, especially as Isabel was perfectly insensible to all these manœuvres.

There she sat, gazing out of window, musing first on the meeting with the live Sir Roland, secondly on the amends to be made in the '*Chapel in the valley.*' The Cloten of the piece must not even be a Vidame, nothing distantly connected with a V; even though this prototype was comporting himself much more like the *nonchalant*, fantastic Viscount, than like her resolute, high-minded Knight of the Porte St. Denis.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HERO OF THE BARRICADES

The page slew the boar,
The peer had the gloire.—*Quentin Durward*

GREAT uneasiness was excited at Dynevor Terrace by the tidings of the insurrection at Paris. After extracting all possible alarm from her third-hand newspaper, Mrs. Frost put on her bonnet to set off on a quest for a sight of the last day's *Times*. James had offered to go, but she was too restless to remain at home; and when he had demonstrated that the rumour must be exaggerated, and that there was no need for alarm, he let her depart, and as soon as she was out of sight, caught up the paper to recur to the terrible reports of the first day's warfare. He paced about the little parlour, reviling himself for not having joined the party, to infuse a little common sense; Fitzjocelyn, no more fit to take care of himself than a baby, probably running into the fray from mere rash indifference! Isabel exposed to every peril and terror! Why had he refused to join them? The answer was maddening. He hated himself, as he found his love for his cousin melting under the influence of jealousy, and of indignation that his own vehement passion must be sacrificed to the tardy, uncertain love which seemed almost an insult to such charms.

'What needs dwelling on it?' he muttered; 'doubtless they are engaged by this time! I shall surely do something desperate if they come here, under my very eye. Would that I could go to the Antipodes, ere I forfeit Louis's love! But my grandmother, Clara! Was ever man so miserably circumstanced?'

A hand was on the door; and he strove to compose his face, lest he should shock his grandmother.

It was not Mrs. Frost.

'Louis! for Heaven's sake, where are they?'

'In the House Beautiful.'

James breathed—'And you! what makes you so pale? What have you done to your arm?'

'A little affair of the barricades. I have been watering the French Republic with my blood.'

'Rushing into the thickest of the row, of course.'

'Only escorting Miss Conway through an assault of the *Garde Nationale*,' said Louis, in a tone as if he had been saying 'walking up the High Street.' How could he help teasing, when he could make such amends?

James began to pace up and down again, muttering something about madness and frenzy.

'It was not voluntary,' said Louis. 'When the carriage was confiscated for the service of the nation, what could we do?—I can tell you, Jem,' he added, fervently, 'what a gallant being she is! It was the glorious perfection of gentle, lofty feminine courage, walking through the raging multitude—through shots, through dreadful sights, like Una through the forest, in Christian maidenly fearlessness.'

James had flung himself into a chair, hiding his face, and steadying his whole person, by resting his elbow on his knee and his brow on his hand, as he put a strong force on himself that he might hear Louis out without betraying himself. Louis paused in ardent contemplation of the image he had called up, and poor James gruffly whispered, 'Go on: you were happy.'

'Very happy, in knowing what cause I have to rejoice for you.'

James gave a great start, and trembled visibly.

'I did not tell you,' pursued Louis, 'that the single moment when she lost her firmness, was when she thought she had lost a certain ivory clasp.'

James could endure no more: 'Louis,' he said, 'you must try me no longer. What do you mean?'

Louis affectionately put his hand on his shoulder: 'I mean, dear Jem, that I understand it now; and it is a noble heart that you have won, and that can value you as you deserve.'

James wrung his hand, and looked bewildered, inquiring, and happy; but his quivering lips could form no words.

'It was a time to reveal the depths of the heart,' said Louis. 'A few words and the loss of the bracelet betrayed much; and afterwards, as far as a lady could, she confessed that something which passed between you the last evening—'

'Louis!' cried James, 'I could not help it! I had been striving against it all along; but if you could imagine how I was tried! You never would come to plead your own cause, and I thought to work for you; but my words are too near the surface. I cut myself short. I have bitterly reproached myself ever since, but I did not know the harm I had done you. Can you forgive me? Can you— No, it is vain to ask; you never can be happy.'

'My dear Jem, you go on at such a pace, there is no answering you. There is no forgiveness in the case. Further acquaintance had already convinced me that she was lovely and perfect, but that "she is na mine ain lassie." Yes, she caught my imagination; and you and my father would have it that I was in love, and I supposed you knew best: but when I was let alone to a rational consideration, I found that to me she is

rather the embodied Isabel of romance, a beauteous vision, than the—the—in short, that there is another who has all that I am wanting in. No, no, dear Jem; it was you who made the generous sacrifice. Have no scruples about me; I am content with the part of Una's Lion, only thankful that *Sans-Loy* and *Sans-Foy* had not quite demolished him before he had seen her restored to the Red Cross Knight.'

It was too much for James; he hid his face in his hands, and burst into tears. Such joy dawning on him, without having either offended or injured his cousin, produced a revulsion of feeling which he could not control, and hearing the street-door opened, he ran out of the room, just before his grandmother came hurrying in, on the wings of the intelligence heard below.

'Yes! I knew my own boy would come to me!' she cried. 'Even Miss Conway has not begun to keep him from me yet.'

'Nor ever will, Aunt Kitty. There are obstacles in the way. You must be granny, and mother, and sister and wife, and all my womankind, a little longer, if you please.' And he sat down fondly at her feet, on a footstool which had been his childish perch.

'Not distressed, you insensible boy?'

'Very happy about Isabel,' said he, turning to look at her with eyes dancing with merry mystification.

'A foolish girl not to like my Louis! I thought better of her; but I suppose my lady has taught her to aim higher!'

'So she does,' said Louis, earnestly.

'Ungrateful girl! Why, Charlotte tells me you led her straight over the barricades, with cannon firing on you all the time!'

'But not Cupid.'

'Then, it is true! and you have really hurt yourself! And so pale! My poor boy!—what is it? I must nurse you.'

'I had so little blood left, that a gnat of tolerable appetite could have made an end of me on Sunday, without more ado. But, instead of that, I had a good little Sister of Charity; and wasn't that alone worth getting a bullet through one's arm?'

Aunt Catharine was shuddering thankfully through the narration, when James came down, his brow unclouded, but his manner still agitated, as if a burthen had been taken away, and he hardly knew how to realize his freedom from the weight.

Mrs. Frost could not part with her boy, and Jane Beckett evidently had a spite against 'they French bandages;' so that Louis only talked of going home enough to get himself flattered and coaxed into remaining at No. 5, as their patient.

The two young men went in the afternoon to inquire after the Conway party, when they found that her ladyship was lying down; but Isabel, who had been summoned from a wholesale conflagration of all the MS. relating to the fantastic Viscount, brought down Miss King, apparently to converse for her; for she did little except blush, and seemed unable to look at either of the friends.

As they took leave, Louisa came into the room with a message that mamma hoped to see Mr. Frost Dynevor to-morrow, and trusted that he had made no engagements for the holidays.

James murmured something inaudible, and ran down-stairs, snarling at Louis as he turned to the Miss Faithfulls' door, and telling him he wanted to obtain a little more petting and commiseration.

'I could not waste such an opportunity of looking interesting!' said Louis, laughing, as he tapped at the door.

Delaforde marshalled out the poor tutor with a sense of triumph. 'His hopes, at least, were destroyed!' thought the butler; and he proceeded to regale Marianne with the romance of the barricades,—how he had himself offered to be Miss Conway's escort, but Lord Fitzjocelyn had declared that not a living soul but himself should be the young lady's champion; and, seeing the young nobleman so bent on it, Mr. Delaforde knew that the force of true affection was not to be stayed, no more than the current of the limpid stream, and had yielded the point; and though, perhaps, his experience might have spared her the contaminating propinquity of the low rabble, yet, considering the circumstances, he did not regret his absence, since he was required for my lady's protection, and, no doubt, two fond hearts had been made happy. Then, in the midnight alarm, when the young nobleman had been disabled, Delaforde had been the grand champion:—he had roused the establishment; he had calmed every one's fears; he had suggested arming all the waiters, and fortifying the windows; he had been the only undaunted representative of the British Lion, when the environs swarmed with deadly foes, with pikes and muskets flashing in the darkness.

Fanshawe had been much too busy with her ladyship's nerves, and too ignorant of French, to gather enough for his refutation, had she wished for it; and, in fact, she had regarded him as the only safeguard of the party, devoutly believing all his reports, and now she was equally willing to magnify her own adventures. What a hero Delaforde was all over the Terrace and its vicinity! People looked out to see the defender of the British name; and Charlotte Arnold mended stockings, and wondered whether her cruelty had made him so desperately courageous.

She could almost have been sorry that the various arrivals kept the domestic establishments of both houses so fully occupied! Poor Tom! she had been a long time without hearing of him! and a hero was turning up on her hands!

The world was not tranquil above-stairs. The removal of the one great obstacle to James's attachment had only made a thousand others visible; and he relapsed into ill-suppressed irritability, to the disappointment of Louis, who did not perceive the cause. At night, however, when Mrs. Frost had gone up, after receiving a promise, meant sincerely, however it might be

kept, that 'poor Louis' should not be kept up late, James began with a groan :

'Now that you are here to attend to my grandmother, I am going to answer this advertisement for a curate near the Land's End.'

'Heyday !'

'It is beyond human endurance to see her daily and not to speak ! I should run wild ! It would be using Lady Conway shamefully.'

'And some one else. What should hinder you from speaking ?'

'You talk as if every one was heir to a peerage.'

'I know what I am saying. I do not see the way to your marriage just yet ; but it would be mere trifling with her feelings, after what has passed already, not to give her the option of engaging herself.'

'I'm sure I don't know what I said ! I was out of myself. I was ashamed to remember that I had betrayed myself, and dared not guess what construction she put on it.'

'Such a construction as could only come from her own heart !'

After some raptures, James added, attempting to be cool, 'You candidly think I have gone so far, that I am bound in honour to make explanation.'

'I am sure it would make her very unhappy if you went off in magnanimous silence to the Land's End ; and remaining as the boy's tutor, without confession, would be a mere delusion and treachery towards my aunt.'

'That woman !'

'She is not her mother.'

'Who knows how far she will think herself bound to obedience ? With that sort of relationship, nobody knows what to be at.'

'I don't think Isabel wishes to make her duty to Lady Conway more stringent than necessary. They live in utterly different spheres ; and, at least, you can be no worse off than you are already.'

'I may be exposing her to annoyance. Women have ten million ways of persecuting each other.'

'Had you seen Isabel's eye when she looked on the wild crowd, you would know how little she would heed worse persecution than my poor aunt could practise. It will soon be my turn to say you don't deserve her.'

James was arguing against his own impulse, and his scruples only desired to be talked down ; Louis's generous and inconsiderate ardour prevailed, and, after interminable discussion, it was agreed that, after some communication with the young lady herself, an interview should be sought with Lady Conway, for which James was already bristling, prepared to resent scorn with scorn.

In the morning, he was savage with shamefacedness, could not endure any spectator, and fairly hunted his cousin home to

Ormersfield, where Louis prowled about in suspense—gave contradictory orders to Frampton, talked as if he was asleep, made Frampton conclude that he had left his heart behind him, and was ever roaming towards the Northwold turnpike.

At about four o'clock, a black figure was seen posting along the centre of the road, and, heated, panting, and glowing, James came up—made a decided and vehement nod with his head, but did not speak till they had turned into the park, when he threw himself flat on the grass under an old thorn, and Louis followed his example, while Farmer Norris's respectable cows stared at the invasion of their privacy.

'*Tout va bien ?*' asked Louis.

'As well as a man in my position can expect! She is the most noble of created beings, Louis!'

'And what is her mother?'

'Don't call her her mother! You shall hear. I could not stay at home! I went to the Faithfulls' room: I found Miss Mercy waiting for her, to join in a walk to some poor person. I went with them. I checked her when she was going into the cottage. We have been walking round Brackley's fields—'

'And poor Miss Mercy?'

'Never remembered her till this moment!'

'She will forgive! And her ladyship?'

'That's the worst of it. She was nearly as bad as you could have been!—so intensely civil and amiable, that I began to think her all on my side. I really could be taken in to suppose she felt for us!'

'I have no doubt she did. My good aunt is very sincerely loth to hurt people's feelings.'

'She talked of her duty! She sympathized! It was not till I was out of the house that I saw it was all by way of letting me down easy—trapping me into binding myself on honour not to correspond.'

'Not correspond!' cried Louis, in consternation. 'Are you not engaged?'

'As far as understanding each other goes. But who knows what may be her machinations, or Isabel's sense of obedience!'

'Does she forbid it?'

'No. She went to speak to Isabel. I fancy she found it unwise to test her power too far; so she came down and palavered me,—assured me that I was personally all that heart could wish—she loved her dear child the better for valuing solid merit. Faugh! how could I stand such gammon? But I must perceive that she was peculiarly circumstanced with regard to Isabel's family; she must not seem to sanction an engagement till I could offer a home suited to her expectations. She said something of my Uncle Oliver; but I disposed of that. However, I dare say it made her less willing to throw me overboard! Any way, she smoothed me and flattered me, till I ended by agreeing that she has no choice but to remove *instantly* from

the Terrace, and forbid me her abode! And, as I said, she wormed a promise from me not to correspond.'

'You have no great loss there. Depend upon it that Isabel would neither brave her openly by receiving your letters, nor submit to do anything underhand.'

'Nor would I ask her!—but it is intolerable to have been tricked into complacent consent.'

'I am glad your *belle-mère* knows how to manage you.'

'I told you she was only less unbearable than yourself. You have it from the same stock.'

'The better for your future peace. I honour her. If she had let the Welsh dragon show his teeth in style, he would only have had to make unpleasant apologies when the good time comes.'

'When!' sighed James.

'If Isabel be the woman I take her for, she will be easily content.'

'She is sick of parade; she has tried how little it can do for a mind like hers: she desires nothing but a home like our own—but what prospect have I of any such thing? Even if the loss of my fellowship were compensated, how could I marry and let Clara be a governess? Clara must be my first consideration. But, I say, we ought to be going home.'

'I thought I was at home.'

'My grandmother and Jane won't be pacified till they see you. They think you are not fit to be in a house by yourself. They both fell on me for having let you go. You must come back, or my grandmother will think you gone off in despair, as you ought to be, and I shall never dare to speak to her.'

'At your service,' said the duteous Fitzjocelyn. 'I'll leave word at the lodge.'

'By the bye, are you up to walking?'

'Candidly, now I think of it, I doubt whether I am. Come, and let us order the carriage.'

'No—no;—I can't stand waiting—I'll go home and get over the first with granny—you come after. Yes; that's right.'

So the hunted Louis waited, contentedly, while James marched back, chary of his precious secret, and unwilling to reveal it even to her, and yet wanting her sympathy.

The disclosure was a greater shock than he had expected from her keen and playful interest in matters of love and matrimony. It was a revival of the mournful past, and she shed tears as she besought him not to be imprudent, to remember his poor father, and not rush into a hasty marriage. He and his sister had been used to poverty, but it was different with Miss Conway.

He bitterly replied, that Lady Conway would take care they were not imprudent; and that instant the granny's heart melted at the thought of his uncertain prospect, and at hearing of the struggles and sufferings that he had undergone. They had not talked half-an-hour, before she had taken home Isabel Conway to her heart as a daughter, and flown in the face of all her

wisdom, but assuring him that she well knew that riches had little to do with happiness ; auguring an excellent living, and, with great sagacity, promising to settle the Terrace on his wife, and repeating, in perfect good faith, all the wonderful probabilities which her husband had seen in it forty years ago.

When Louis arrived, he found her alone, and divided between pride in her grandson's conquest, and some anxiety on his own account, which took the form of asking him what he meant by saying that Isabel aimed higher than himself.

'Did she not?' said Louis ; and with a sort of compunction for a playful allusion to the sacred calling, he turned it off with, 'Why, what do you think of Roland ap Dynasvawr ap Roland ap Gruffydd ap Rhys ap Morgan ap Llywellwyn ap Roderic ap Caradoc ap Arthur ap Uther ap Pendragon?' running this off with calm, slow, impressive deliberation.

'Certify me, Louis dear, before I can quite rejoice, that this fun is not put on.'

'Did you think me an arrant dissembler? No, indeed : before I guessed how it was with them, I had found out— Oh ! Aunt Kitty, shall I ever get Mary to believe in me, after the ridiculous way in which I have behaved to her?'

'Is this what you really mean?'

'Indeed it is. The very presence of Isabel could not keep me from recurring to her ; and at home, not a room, not a scene, but is replete with recollections of all that she was to me last year ! And that I should only understand it when half the world is between us ! How mad I was ! How shall I ever persuade her to forget my past folly ? Past ! Nay, folly and inconsistency are blended in all I do, and now they have lost me the only person who could help me to conquer them ! And now she is beyond my reach, and I shall never be worthy of her.'

He was much agitated. The sight of James's success, and the return to his solitary home, had stirred up his feelings very strongly ; and he needed his aunt's fond soothing and sympathy—but it was not difficult to comfort and cheer him. His disposition was formed more for affection than passion, and his attachment to Mary was of a calmer nature than his fiery cousin would have allowed to be love. It took a good deal of working-up to make it outwardly affect his spirits or demeanour ; in general, it served only as an ingredient in the pensiveness that pervaded all his moods, even his most arrant nonsense.

The building of castles for James, and the narration of the pleasing delusion in which he had brought home his aunt, were sufficient to enliven him. He was to go the next morning to call upon Lady Conway, and see whether he could persuade her into any concessions : James was very anxious that Isabel and his grandmother should meet, and was beginning to propose that Louis should arrange an interview for them in Miss Faithfull's room, before the departure, which was fixed for Monday.

'I intend to call upon Lady Conway,' said Mrs. Frost, with

dignity that made him feel as if he had been proposing something contraband.

Louis went first, and was highly entertained by the air of apology and condolence with which his aunt received him. She told him how excessively concerned she was, and how guilty she felt towards him—a score on which, he assured her, she had no need to reproach herself. She had heard enough from Isabel to lead to so much admiration of his generosity, that he was obliged to put a stop to it, without being skilful enough to render sincerity amiable; but she seemed satisfied, eagerly assured him of her approval, and declared that she fully understood him.

Had she explained, he would have thought her understanding went too far. She entirely forgave him. After all, he was her own sister's son, and Isabel only a step-daughter; and though she had done her duty by putting Isabel in the way of the connection, she secretly commended his prudence in withstanding beauty, and repairing the dilapidated estate with Peruvian gold. She sounded him, as a very wise man, on the chances of Oliver Dynevor doing something for his nephew, but did not receive much encouragement; though he prophesied that James was certain to get on, and uttered a rhapsody that nearly destroyed his new reputation for judgment. Lady Conway gave him an affectionate invitation to visit her whenever he could, and summoned the young ladies to wish him good-bye. The mute, blushing gratitude of Isabel's look was beautiful beyond description; and Virginia's countenance was exceedingly arch and keen, though she was supposed to know nothing of the state of affairs.

Lady Conway was alone when Mrs. Frost was seen approaching the house. The lady at once prepared to be affably gracious to her apologies and deprecations of displeasure; but she was quite disconcerted by the dignified manner of her entrance;—tall, noble-looking, in all the simple majesty of age, and of a high though gentle spirit, Lady Conway was surprised into absolute respect, and had to rally her ideas before, with a slight laugh, she could say, 'I see you are come to condole with me on the folly of our two young people.'

'I think too highly of them to call it folly,' said the heiress of the Dynevors.

'Why, in one way, to be sure,' hesitated Lady Conway, 'we cannot call it folly to be sensible of each other's merits; and if—if Mr. Dynevor have any expectations—I think your son is unmarried?'

'He is;' but she added, smiling, 'you will not expect me to allow that my youngest child is old enough to warrant any calculations on that score.'

'It is very unfortunate; I pity them from my heart. An engagement of this kind is a wretched beginning for life.'

'Oh, do not say so!' cried the old lady; 'it may often be the greatest blessing, the best incentive to both parties.'

Lady Conway was too much surprised to make a direct answer, but she continued, 'If my brother could exert his interest—and I know that he has so high an opinion of dear Mr. Dynevor—and you have so much influence. That dear, generous Fitzjocelyn, too—'

As soon as Mrs. Frost understood whom Lady Conway designated as her brother, she drew herself up, and said, coldly, that Lord Ormersfield had no church patronage, and no interest that he could exert on behalf of her grandson.

Again, 'it was most unlucky;' and Lady Conway proceeded to say that she was the more bound to act in opposition to her own feelings, because Mr. Mansell was resolved against bequeathing Beauchastel to any of his cousinhood who might marry a clergyman; disliking that the place should fall to a man who ought not to reside. It was a most unfortunate scruple; but in order to avoid offending him, and losing any chance, the engagement must remain a secret.

Mrs. Frost replied, that Mr. Mansell was perfectly right; and seemed in nowise discomfited or conscious that there was any condescension on her ladyship's part in winking at an attachment between Miss Conway and a Dynevor of Cheveleigh. She made neither complaint nor apology; there was nothing for Lady Conway to be gracious about; and when the request was made to see Miss Conway, her superiority was so fully established that there was no demur, and the favour seemed to be on her side.

The noble old matron had long been a subject of almost timid veneration to the maiden, and she obeyed the summons with more bashful awe than she had ever felt before; and with much fear lest the two elders might have been combining to make an appeal to her to give up her betrothal for James's sake.

As she entered, the old lady came to meet her, held out both arms, and drew her into her bosom, with the fond words, 'My dear child!'

Isabel rested in her embrace, as if she had found her own mother again.

'My dear child,' again said Mrs. Frost, 'I am glad you like my Jem, for he has always been a good boy to his granny.'

The homeliness of the words made them particularly endearing, and Isabel ventured to put her arm round the slender waist.

'Yes, darling,' continued the grandmother; 'you will make him good and happy, and you must teach him to be patient, for I am afraid you will both want a great deal of patience and submission.'

'He will teach me,' whispered Isabel.

Lady Conway was fairly crying.

'I am glad to know that he has you to look to, when his old grandmother is gone.'

‘Oh, don’t say—’

‘I shall make way for you some day,’ said Mrs. Frost, caressing her. ‘You are leaving us, my dear. It is quite right, and we will not murmur; but would not your mamma spare you to us for one evening? Could you not come and drink tea with us, that we may know each other a little better?’

The stepmother’s affectionate assent, and even emotion, were a great surprise to Isabel; and James began to imagine that nothing was beyond Mrs. Frost’s power.

Louis saved James the trouble of driving him away by going to dine with Mr. Calcott, and the evening was happy, even beyond anticipation; the grandmother all affection, James all restless bliss, Isabel serene amid her blushes; and yet the conversation would not thrive, till Mrs. Frost took them out walking, and, when in the loneliest lane, conceived a wish to inquire the price of poultry at the nearest farm, and sent the others to walk on. Long did she talk of the crops, discourse of the French and Bohemian enormities, and smilingly contradict reports that the young lord was to marry the young lady, before the lovers reappeared, without the most distant idea where they had been.

After that, they could not leave off talking; they took granny into their counsels; and she heard Isabel confess how the day-dream of her life had been to live among the ‘very good.’ She smiled with humble self-conviction of falling far beneath the standard, as she discovered that the enthusiastic girl had found all her aspirations for ‘goodness’ realized by Dynevor Terrace; and regarding it as peace, joy, and honour to be linked with it. The newly-found happiness, and the effort to be worthy of it, were to bear her through all uncongenial scenes; she had such a secret of joy that she should never repine again.

‘Ah! Isabel, and what am I to do?’ said James.

‘You ask?’ she said, smiling. ‘You, who have Northwold for your home, and live in the atmosphere I only breathe now and then?’

‘Your presence is my atmosphere of life.’

‘Mrs. Frost, tell him he must not talk so wrongly, so extravagantly, I mean.’

‘It may be wrong; it is not extravagant. It falls only too far short of my feeling! What will the Terrace be without you?’

‘It will not be without my thoughts. How often I shall think I see the broad road, and the wide field, and the mountain-ash berries, that were reddening when we came; and the canary in the window! How little my first glance at the houses took in what they would be to me!’

And then they had to settle the haunts she was to revisit at Beauchastel. An invitation thither was the ostensible cause of the rapid break-up from the House Beautiful; but the truth

was not so veiled but that there were many surmises among the uninitiated. Jane had caught something from my young lord's demeanour which certified her, and made her so exceedingly proud and grand, that though she was too honourable to breathe a word of her discovery, she walked with her kind old head three inches higher ; and, as a great favour, showed Charlotte a piece of poor dear Master Henry's bridecake, kept for luck, and a little roll of treasured real Brussels lace, that she had saved to adorn her cap whenever Mr. James should marry.

Charlotte was not as attentive as she might have been to such interesting curiosities. She had one eye towards the window all the time ; she wanted to be certified how deeply she had wounded the hero of the barricade, and she had absolutely not seen him since his return ! The little damsel missed homage !

'You are not heeding me !' exclaimed Jane at last.

'Yes ; I beg your pardon, ma'am—'

'Charlotte, take care. Mind me, one thing at a time,' said Jane, oracularly. 'Not one eye here, the other there !'

'I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Mrs. Beckett.

'Come, don't colour up, and say you don't know nothing ! Why did you water your lemon plant three times over, but that you wanted to be looking out of window ? Why did you never top nor tail the gooseberries for the pudding, but sent them up fit to choke my poor missus ? If Master Jem hadn't— Bless me ! what was I going to say ?—but we should soon have heard of it ! No, no, Charlotte ; I've been a mother to you ever since you came here, a little starveling thing, and I'll speak plain for your good. If you fancy that genteel butler in there, say so downright ; but first sit down, and write away a letter to give up the other young man !'

Charlotte's cheeks were in a flame, and something vehement at the end of her tongue, when, with a gentle knock, and 'By your favour, ladies,' in walked Mr. Delaford.

Jane was very civil, but very stiff at first, till he thawed her by great praise of Lord Fitzjocelyn, the mere prelude to his own magnificent exploits.

Charlotte listened like a very Desdemona. He was very pathetic, and all that was not self-exaltation was aimed at her. Nothing could have been more welcome than the bullets to penetrate his heart, and he turned up his eyes in a feeling manner.

Charlotte's heart was exceedingly touched, and she had tears in her eyes when she moved forward in the attitude of the porcelain shepherdess in the parlour, to return a little volume of selections of tender poetry, bound in crimson silk, that he had lent to her some time since. 'Would she not honour him by accepting a trifling gift ?'

She blushed, she accepted ; and with needle-like pen, in characters fine as hair, upon a scroll garlanded with forget-me-nots,

and borne in mid air by two portly doves, was Charlotte Arnold's name inscribed by the hero of the barricades.

Oh, vanity ! vanity ! how many garbs dost thou wear !

Delaforde went away, satisfied that he had produced an impression such as he could improve if they should ever be thrown together again.

The Lady of Eschalott remained anything but satisfied. She was touchy and fretful, found everything a grievance, left cobwebs in the corners, and finally went into hysterics because the cat jumped at the canary-bird's cage.

CHAPTER XXII

BURGOMASTERS AND GREAT ONE-EYERS

When full upon his ardent soul
The champion feels the influence roll,
He swims the lake, he leaps the wall,
Heeds not the depth, nor plumbs the fall.
Unshielded, mailless, on he goes,
Singly against a host of foes !—*Harold the Dauntless*

'JEM ! Jem ! have you heard ?'

'What should I hear ?'

'Mr. Lester is going to retire at Christmas !'

'Does that account for your irrational excitement ?'

'And it has not occurred to you that the grammar-school would be the making of you ! Endowment, 150*l.*—thirty, forty boys at 10*l.* per annum, 400*l.* at least. That is 550*l.*—say 600*l.* for certain ; and it would be doubled under a scholar and a gentleman—1200*l.* a year ! And you might throw it open to boarders ; set up the houses in the Terrace, and let them at—say 40*l.* Nine houses, nine times forty—'

'Well done, Fitzjocelyn ! At this rate one need not go out to Peru.'

'Exactly so ; you would be doubling the value of your own property as a secondary consideration, and doing incalculable good—'

'As if there were any more chance of my getting the school than of the rest of it !'

'So you really had not thought of standing ?'

'I would, most gladly, if there were the least hope of success. I can't afford to miss any chance ; but it is mere folly to talk of it. One-half of the trustees detest my principles ; the others would think themselves insulted by a young man in deacon's orders offering himself.'

'It is evident that you are the only man on whom they can combine who can save the school, and do any good to all those boys—mind you, the important middle class, whom I would do anything to train in sound principles.'

‘So far, it is in my favour that I am one of the few University men educated here.’

‘You are your grandmother’s grandson—that is everything ; and you have more experience of teaching than most men twice your age.’

James made a face at his experience ; but little stimulus was needed to make him attempt to avail himself of so fair an opening, coming so much sooner than he could have dared to expect. It was now September, and the two months of waiting and separation seemed already like so many years. By the time Mrs. Frost came in from her walk, she found the two young gentlemen devising a circular, and composing applications for testimonials.

After the first start of surprise, and telling James he ought to go to school himself, Mrs. Frost was easily persuaded to enter heartily into the project ; but she insisted on the first measure being to consult Mr. Calcott. He was the head of the old sound and respectable party—the chairman of everything, both in county and borough—and had the casting vote among the eight trustees of King Edward’s School, who, by old custom, nominated each other from the landholders within the town. She strongly deprecated attempting anything without first ascertaining his views ; and, as the young men had lashed themselves into great ardour, the three walked off at once to lay the proposal before the Squire.

But Mr. Calcott was not at home. He had set off yesterday, with Miss Calcott and Miss Caroline, for a tour in Wales, and would not return for a week or ten days.

To the imaginations of Lord Fitzjocelyn and Mr. Frost, this was fatal delay. Besides, he would be sure to linger !—He would not come home for a month—nay, six weeks at least !—What candidates might not start—what pledges might not be given in the meantime !

James, vehement and disappointed, went home to spend the evening on the concoction of what his grandmother approved as ‘a very proper letter,’ to be despatched to meet the Squire at the post-office at Caernarvon, and resigned himself to grumble away the period of his absence, secretly relieved at the postponement of the evil day of the canvass, at which all the Pendragon blood was in a state of revolt.

But Louis, in his solitude at Ormersfield, had nothing to distract his thoughts, or prevent him from lapsing into one of his most single-eyed fits of impetuosity. He had come to regard James as the sole hope for Northwold school, and Northwold school as the sole hope for James ; and had created an indefinite host of dangerous applicants, only to be forestalled by the most vigorous measures. Evening, night, and morning did but increase the conviction, till he ordered his horse, and galloped to the Terrace, as though the speed of his charger would decide the contest.

Eloquently and piteously did he protest against James’s pro-

mise to take no steps until the Squire's opinion should be known. He convinced his cousin, talked over his aunt, and prevailed to have the letter re-written, and sent off to the post with the applications for testimonials.

Then the rough draft of the circular was revised and corrected, till it appeared so admirable to Louis, that he snatched it up, and ran away with it to read it to old Mr. Walby, who was one of the trustees, and very fond of his last year's patient. His promise, good easy man, was pretty sure to be the prize of the first applicant; but this did not render it less valuable to his young lordship, who came back all glorious with an eighth part of the victory, and highly delighted with the excellent apothecary's most judicious and gratifying sentiments,—namely, all his own eager rhetoric, to which the good man had cordially given his meek puzzle-headed assent. Thenceforth Mr. Walby was to 'think' all Fitzjocelyn's strongest recommendations of his cousin.

There was no use in holding back now. James was committed; and, besides, there was a vision looming in the distance of a scholar from a foreign University with less than half a creed. Thenceforth prompt measures were a mere duty to the rising generation; and Louis dragged his Coriolanus into the town, to call upon certain substantial tradesmen who had voices among the eight.

Civility was great; but the portly grocer and gentlemanly bookseller had both learned prudence in many an election; neither would make any immediate reply—the one because he never did anything but what Mr. Calcott directed, and the other never pledged himself till all the candidates were in the field, and he had impartially printed all their addresses.

Richardson, the solicitor, and man-of-business to the Ormersfield estate, appeared so sure a card, that James declared that he was ashamed of the farce of calling upon him; but they obtained no decided reply. Louis was proud that Richardson should display an independent conscience, and disdained his cousin's sneering comment, that he had forgotten that there were no other clients in the county besides the Fitzjocelyns.

No power could drag Mr. Frost a step further. He would not hear of canvassing that 'very intelligent' Mr. Ramsbotham, of the Factory, who had been chosen at unawares by the trustees before his principles had developed themselves; far less on his nominee, the wealthy butcher, always more demonstratively of the same mind.

James declared, first, that he would have nothing to do with them; secondly, that he could not answer it to the Earl to let Louis ask a favour of them; thirdly, that he had rather fail than owe his election to them; fourthly, that it would be most improper usage of Mr. Calcott to curry favour with men who systematically opposed him; and, fifthly, that they could only vote for him on a misunderstanding of his intentions.

The eighth trustee was a dead letter,—an old gentleman long retired from business at his bank to a cottage at the Lakes, where he was written to, but without much hope of his taking the trouble even to reply. However, if the choice lay only between James and the representative of the new lights, there could be little reasonable fear.

Much fretting and fuming was expended on the non-arrival of a letter from Mr. Calcott ; but on the appointed tenth day he came home, and the next morning James was at Ormersfield in an agony of disappointment. The Squire had sent him a note, kind in expression, regretting his inability to give his interest to one for whom he had always so much regard, and whose family he so highly respected ; but that he had already promised his support to a Mr. Powell, the under-master of a large classical school, whom he thought calculated for the situation, both by experience and acquirements.

James had been making sure enough of the school to growl at his intended duties ; but he had built so entirely on success, and formed so many projects, that the disappointment was extreme ; it appeared a cruel injury in so old a friend to have overlooked him. He had been much vexed with his grandmother for regarding the veto as decisive ; and he viewed all his hopes of happiness with Isabel as overthrown.

Louis partook and exaggerated his sentiments. They railed—the one fiercely, the other philosophically—against the Squire's domineering ; they proved him narrow and prejudiced—afraid of youth, afraid of salutary reform, bent on prolonging the dull old system, and on bringing in a mere usher. They recollected a *mauvais sujet* from the said classical school ; argued that it never turned out good scholars, nor good men ; and that they should be conferring the greatest benefit on Northwold burghers yet unborn, by recalling the old Squire to a better mind, or by bringing in James Frost in spite of him.

Not without hopes of the first, though, as James told him, no one would have nourished them save himself, Louis set forth for Little Northwold, with the same valour which had made him the champion of the Marksedge poacher. He found the old gentleman good-natured and sympathizing, for he liked the warm friendship of 'the two boys,' and had not the most remote idea of their disputing his verdict.

'It is very unlucky that I was from home,' he said. 'I am afraid the disappointment will be the greater from its having gone so far.'

'May I ask whether you are absolutely pledged to Mr. Powell ?'

'Why, yes, I may say so. Considering all things, it is best as it is. I should have been unwilling to vex my good old friend, Mrs. Frost ; and yet,' smiling benignantly on his fretted auditor, 'I have to look out for the school first of all, you know.'

'Perhaps I shall not allow that Mr. Powell is the best look-out for the school, sir.'

'Eh? The best under the circumstances. Such a place as this wants experience and discipline more than scholarship. Powell is the very man, and has been waiting for it long; and young Frost could do much better for himself if he will only have patience.'

'Then his age is all that is against him? The only inferiority to Mr. Powell?'

'H'm! yes, I may say so. Inferior? No, he is superior enough; it is a mere joke to compare them; but this is not a post for one of your young unmarried men.'

'If that be all,' cried Louis, 'the objection would be soon removed. It may be an inducement to hear that you would be making two people happy instead of one.'

'Now, don't tell me so!' almost angrily exclaimed the Squire. 'Jem Frost marry! He has no business to think of it these ten years! He ought to be minding his grandmother and sister. To marry on that school would be serving poor Mrs. Frost exactly as his poor absurd father did before him, and she is too old to have all that over again. I thought he was of a different sort of stamp.'

'My aunt gives her full consent.'

'I've no doubt of it! just like her! But he ought to be ashamed to ask her, at her age, when she should have every comfort he could give her. Pray, who is the lady? There was some nonsense afloat about Miss Conway; but I never believed him so foolish!'

'It is perfectly true, but I must beg you not to mention it; I ought not to have been betrayed into mentioning it.'

'You need not caution me. It is not news I should be forward to spread. What does your father say to it?'

'The engagement took place since he left England.'

'I should think so!' Then pausing, he added, with condescending good-nature, 'Well, Fitzjocelyn, I seem to you a terrible old flint-stone, but I can't help that. There are considerations besides true love, you know; and for these young people, they can't have pined out their hearts yet, as, by your own showing, they have not been engaged three months. If it were Sydney himself, I should tell him that love is all the better for keeping—if it is good for anything; and where there is such a disparity, it ought, above all, to be tested by waiting. So tell Master Jem, with my best wishes, to take care of his grandmother. I shall think myself doing him a kindness in keeping him out of the school, if it is to hinder him from marrying at four-and-twenty, and a girl brought up as she has been!'

'And, Mr. Calcott,' said Louis, rising, 'you will excuse my viewing my cousin's engagement as an additional motive for doing my utmost to promote his success in obtaining a situation for which I consider him as eminently fitted. Good morning, sir.'

'Good morning, my lord.'

Lord Fitzjocelyn departed so grave, so courteous, so dignified, so resolute, so comically like his father, that the old Squire threw himself back in his chair and laughed heartily. The magnificent challenge of war to the knife was no more to him than the adjuration he had heard last year in the justice-room ; and he no more expected these two lads to make any effectual opposition than he did to see them repeal the game-laws.

The Viscount meanwhile rode off thoroughly roused to indignation. The good sense of sixty naturally fell hard and cold on the ears of twenty-two, and it was one of the moments when counsel inflamed instead of checking him. Never angry on his own account, he could be exceedingly wrathful for others ; and the unlucky word, disparity, drove him especially wild. In mere charity, he thought it right to withhold this insult to the Pendragons from his cousin's ears ; but this very reserve seemed to bind him to resent it in James's stead ; and he was far more blindly impetuous than if, as usual, he had seen James so vehement that he was obliged to try to curb and restrain him.

He would not hear of giving in ! When the Ramsbotham candidate appeared, and James scrupled to divide the contrary interest, Louis laid the whole blame of the split upon Mr. Calcott ; while, as to poor Mr. Powell, no words were compassionate enough for his dull, slouching, ungentlemanly air ; and he was pronounced to be an old writing-master, fit for nothing but to mend pens.

But Mr. Walby's was still their sole promise. The grocer followed the Squire ; the bookseller was liberal, and had invited the Ramsbotham candidate to dinner. On this alarming symptom, Fitzjocelyn fell upon Richardson, and talked, and talked, and talked till the solicitor could either bear it no longer, or feared for the Ormersfield agency ; and his vote was carried off as a captive.

This triumph alarmed Mrs. Frost and James, who knew how scrupulously the Earl abstained from seeking anything like a favour at Northwold ; and they tried to impress this on Louis, but he was exalted far above even understanding the remonstrance. It was all their disinterestedness ; he had no notion of that guarded pride which would incur no obligation. No, no ; if Jem would be beholden to no one, he would accept all as personal kindness to himself. Expect a return ! he returned good-will--of course he would do any one a kindness. Claims, involving himself ! he would take care of that ; and off he went laughing.

He came in the next day, announcing a still grander and more formidable encounter. He had met Mr. Ramsbotham himself, and secured his promise that, in case he failed in carrying his own man, he and the butcher would support Mr. Frost.

The fact was, that Lord Fitzjocelyn's advocacy of the poacher, his free address, his sympathy for 'the masses,' and his careless words, had inspired expectations of his liberal views ; Mr.

Ramsbotham was not sorry to establish a claim, and was likewise gratified by the frank engaging manners, which increased the pleasure of being solicited by a nobleman—a distinction of which he thought more than did all the opposite party.

To put James beyond the perils of the casting vote was next the point. Without divulging his tactics, Louis flew off one morning by the train, made a sudden descent on the recluse banker at Ambleside, barbarously used his gift of the ceaseless tongue, till the poor old man was nearly distracted, touched his wife's tender heart with good old Mrs. Frost and the two lovers, and made her promise to bring him comfortably and quietly down to stay at Ormersfield and give his vote.

And so, when the election finally came on, Mr. Calcott found himself left with only his faithful grocer to support his *protégé*. Three votes were given at once for the Reverend James Roland Frost Dynevor; the bookseller followed as soon as he saw how the land lay; and Ramsbotham and Co. swelled the majority as soon as they saw that their friend had no chance.

Poor Mr. Powell went home to his drudgery with his wrinkles deeper than ever; and his wife sighed as she resigned her last hope of sending her son to the University.

Mr. Calcott had, for the first time in his life, been over-ridden by an unscrupulous use of his neighbour's rank; and of the youthfulness that inspired hopes of fixing a claim on an untried, inexperienced man.

The old Squire was severely hurt and mortified; but he was very magnanimous—generously wished James joy, and congratulated Mrs. Frost with all his heart. He was less cordial with Louis; but the worst he said of him was, that he was but a lad, his father was out of the way, and he wished he might not find that he had got himself into a scrape. He could not think why a man of old Ormersfield's age should go figuring round Cape Horn, instead of staying to keep his own son in order.

Sydney was absent; but the rest of the family and their friends were less forbearing than the person chiefly concerned. They talked furiously, and made a strong exertion of forgiveness in order not to cut Fitzjocelyn. Sir Gilbert Brewster vowed that it would serve him right to be turned out of the troop, and that he must keep a sharp look out lest he should sow disaffection among the Yeomanry. Making friends with Ramsbotham! never taking out a gun! The country was going to the dogs when such as he was to be a peer!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TRYSTE

One single flash of glad surprise
 Just glanced from Isabel's dark eyes,
 Then vanished in the blush of shame
 That as its penance instant came—
 'O thought unworthy of my race!'—*The Lord of the Isles*

As little recked Fitzjocelyn of the murmurs which he had provoked, as he guessed the true secret of his victory. In his eyes, it was the triumph of merit over prejudice; and Mrs. Frost espoused the same gratifying view, though ascribing much to her nephew's activity; and James himself, flushed with hope and success, was not likely to dissent.

Next they had to make their conquest available. Apart from Louis's magnificent prognostications, at the lowest computation, the head-master's income amounted to a sum which to James appeared affluence; and though there was no house provided, it mattered the less since there were five to choose from in the Terrace, even if his grandmother had not wished that their household should be still the same. With Miss Conway's own fortune and the Terrace settled on herself, where could be any risk?

Would Lady Conway think so? and how should the communication be made? James at first proposed writing to her, enclosing a letter to Isabel; but he changed his mind, unable to satisfy himself that, when absent from restraint, she might not send a refusal without affording her daughter the option. He begged his grandmother to write to Isabel; but she thought her letter might carry too much weight, and, whatever might be her hopes, it was not for her to tell the young lady that such means were sufficient.

Louis begged to be the bearer of the letter. His aunt would certainly keep terms with him, and he could insure that the case was properly laid before Isabel; and, as there could be no doubt at present of his persuasive powers, James caught at the offer. The party were still at Beauchastel, and he devised going to his old quarters at Ebbscreek, and making a descent upon them from thence.

When he came to take up his credentials, he found James and his little black leathern bag determined to come at least to Ebbscreek with him, and declaring it made him frantic to stay at home and leave his cause in other hands, and that he could not exist anywhere but close to the scene of action.

Captain Hannaford was smoking in his demi-boat, and gave his former lodgers a hearty welcome; but he twinkled knowingly with his eye, and so significantly volunteered to inform them that the ladies were still at Beauchastel, that James's

wrath at the old skipper's impudence began to revive, and he walked off to the remotest end of the garden.

The Captain, remaining with Louis, with whom he was always on far more easy terms, looked after the other gentleman, winked again, and confessed that he had suspected one or other of them might be coming that way this summer, though he could not say he had expected to see them both together.

'Mind, Captain,' said Louis, 'it wasn't *I* that made the boat late this time last year.'

'Well! I might be wrong; I fancied you cast an eye that way. Then maybe it ain't true what's all over the place here.'

Louis pressed to hear what. 'Why, that when the French were going on like Robert Spear and them old times, he had convoyed the young lady right through the midst of them; and they would both have been shot, if my lady's butler hadn't come down with a revolver, killed half-a-dozen of the mob, and rescued them out of it; but that Lord Fitzjocelyn had been desperately wounded in going back to fetch her bracelet, and Mr. Delaford had carried him out in his arms.'

'Well!' said Louis, coolly, without altering a muscle of his face, as the Captain looked for an angry negative.

'And when they got home,—so the story went,—Mr. Frost, the tutor, was so mad with jealousy and rage, that my lady declared those moorings would not suit her no longer, but had let go, and laid her head right for Beauchastel.'

'Pray what was the young lady supposed to think of the matter?'

Reports appeared to vary. One version said that Mr. Delaford had found him on his knees to her; and that my lady had snatched her cruelly away, because she would not have her married before her own daughters, and looked over all the post, for fear there should be a letter for her. Another declared that Miss Conway would not have him at any price, and was set upon the poor tutor, and that he was lying dangerously ill of a low fever.—'The women will have it so,' observed the Captain; 'the story's everywhere, except maybe in the parlour at Beauchastel, and I wouldn't wonder if Mrs. Mansell knew it all herself, for her maid has a tongue a yard long. I won't say but I thought there might be some grain of truth at the bottom—'

'And you shall hear it by and by, when I know what it is myself.'

'I'd not say I would have believed it the more if that fine gentleman had taken his oath of it—a fellow that ain't to be trusted,' observed the Captain.

This might have led to a revelation, if Louis had had time to attend to it; but he had pity on James's impatient misery, and proceeded to ask the loan of the boat. The tide would not, however, serve; and as waiting till it would was not to be endured, the two cousins set off to walk together through the woods, Louis beguiling the way by chaffing James, as far as he

would bear, with the idea of Isabel's name being trifled with by the profane crowd.

He left James at the gate of the park, prowling about like a panther to try for a glimpse of Isabel's window, and feeding his despair and jealousy that Louis should boldly walk up to the door, while he, with so much better a right, was excluded by his unguarded promise to Lady Conway.

All the tumultuary emotions of his mind were endlessly repeated, and many a slow and pealing note of the church-clock had added fuel to his impatience, and spurred him to rush up to the door and claim his rights, before Louis came bounding past the lodge-gates, flourishing his cap, and crying, 'Hurrah, Jem! All right!'

'I'm going to her at once!' cried Jem, beginning to rush off; but Louis caught and imprisoned his arm.

'Not so fast, sir! You are to see her. I promise you shall see her if you wish it, but it must be in my aunt's way.'

'Let me go, I say!'

'When I have walked five miles in your service, you won't afford me an arm to help me back. I am *not* a horse with wings, and I won't be Cupid's post except on my own terms. Come back.'

'I don't stir till I have heard the state of the case.'

'Yes, you do; for all the sportsmen will be coming home, and my aunt would not for all the world that Mr. Mansell caught you on the forbidden ground.'

'How can you give in to such shuffling nonsense! If I am to claim Isabel openly, why am I not to visit her openly? You have yielded to that woman's crooked policy. I don't trust you!'

'When you are her son, you may manage her as you please. Just now she has us in her power, and can impose conditions. Come on; and if you are good, you shall hear.'

Drawing James along with him through the beechwood glades, he began, 'You would have been more insane still if you had guessed at my luck. I found Isabel alone. Mrs. Mansell had taken the girls to some juvenile fête, and Delaford was discreet enough not to rouse my aunt from her letters. I augured well from the happy conjunction.'

'Go on; don't waste time in stuff.'

'Barkis is willing, then. Is that enough to the point?'

'Fitzjocelyn, you never had any feelings yourself, and therefore you trifle with those of others.'

'I beg your pardon. It was a shame! Jem, you may be proud. She trusts you completely; and whatever you think sufficient, she regards as ample.'

'Like her! Only too like her. Such confidence makes one feel a redoubled responsibility.'

'I thought I had found something at which you could not grumble.'

'How does she look? How do they treat her?'

'Apparently they have not yet fed her on bread and water. No ; seriously, I must confess that she looked uncommonly well and lovely ! Never mind, Jem ; I verily believe that, in spite of absence and all that, she had never been so happy in her life. If any description could convey the sweetness of voice and manner when she spoke of you ! I could not look in her face. Those looks can only be for you. We talked it over, but she heeded no ways and means ; it was enough that you were satisfied. She says the subject has never been broached since the flight from Northwold, and that Lady Conway's kindness never varies ; and she told me she had little fear but that her dear mamma would be prevailed on to give sanction enough to hinder her from feeling as if she were doing wrong, or setting a bad example to her sisters. They know nothing of it ; but Walter, who learnt it no one knows how, draws the exemplary moral, that it serves his mother right for inflicting a tutor on him.'

'Has she had my letter ? Does she know I am here ?'

'Wait ! All this settled, and luncheon being ready, down came my lady, and we played unconsciousness to our best ability. I must confess my aunt beat us hollow ! Isabel then left us to our conference, which we conducted with the gravity of a tailor and an old woman making a match in Brittany.'

'You came out with that valuable improvable freehold, the Terrace, I suppose ?'

'I told the mere facts ! My aunt was rather grand about a grammar-school ; she said even a curacy would sound better, and she must talk it over with Isabel. I gave your letter, conjuring her to let Isabel have it ; and though she declared that it was no kindness, and would put the poor darling into needless perplexity, she was touched with my forbearance, in not having given it before, when I had such an opportunity. So she went away, and stayed a weary while ; but when she came, it was worth the waiting. She said Isabel was old enough to know her own mind, and the attachment being so strong, and you so unexceptionable, she did not think it possible to object : she had great delight in seeing you made happy, and fulfilling the dictates of her own heart, now that it could be done with moderate prudence. They go to Scarborough in a fortnight, and you will be welcome there. There's for you !'

'Louis, you are the best fellow living ! But you said I was to see her at once.'

'I asked, why wait for Scarborough ? and depicted you hovering disconsolately round the precincts. Never mind, Jem, I did not make you more ridiculous than human nature must needs paint a lover, and it was all to melt her heart. I was starting off to fetch you, when I found she was in great terror. She had never told the Mansells of the matter, and they must be prepared. She cannot have it transpire while she is in their house, and, in fact, is excessively afraid of Mr Mansell, and wants to tell her

story by letter. Now, I think, considering all things, she has a right to take her own way.'

'You said I was not to go without meeting her!'

'I had assented, and was devising how to march off my lunatic quietly, when the feminine good-natured heart that is in her began to relent, and she looked up in my face with a smile, and said the poor dears were really exemplary, and if Isabel *should* walk to the beach and should meet any one there, she need know nothing about it.'

'What says Isabel?'

'She held up her stately head, and thought it would be a better return for Mr. Mansell's kindness to tell him herself before leaving Beauchastel; but Lady Conway entreated her not to be hasty, and protested that her fears were of Mr. Mansell's displeasure with her for not having taken better care of her—she dreaded a break, and so on,—till the end of it was, that though we agree that prudence would carry us off to-morrow morning, yet her ladyship will look the other way, if you happen to be on the southern beach at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. I suppose you were very headlong and peremptory in your note, for I could not imagine Isabel consenting to a secret tryst even so authorized.'

'I never asked for any such thing. I would not for worlds see her led to do anything underhand.'

'She will honour you! That's right, Jem!'

'Neither as a clergyman, nor as a Dynevor, can I consent to trick even those who have no claim to her duty!'

'Neither as a gentleman, nor as a human creature,' added Louis, in the same tone. 'Shall I go back and give your answer?'

'No; you are walking lame enough already.'

'No matter for that.'

'To tell you the truth, I can't stand your being with her again, while I am made a fool of by that woman. If I'm not to see her, I'll be off. I'll send her a note; we will cross to Bickleypool, and start by the mail train this very night.'

Louis made no objection, and James hurried him into the little parlour, where in ten minutes the note was dashed off:—

'MY OWN MOST PRECIOUS ONE!—(as, thanks to my most unselfish of cousins, I may dare to call you,)—I regret my fervency and urgency for an interview, since it led you to think I could purchase even such happiness by a subterfuge unworthy of my calling, and an ill return of the hospitality to which we owed our first meeting. We will meet when I claim you in the face of day, without the sense of stolen felicity, which is a charm to commonplace minds. My glory is in the assurance that you understand my letter, approve, and are relieved. With such sanction, and with ardour before you like mine, I see that you could do no other than consent, and there is not a shadow of

censure in my mind ; but if, without compromising your sense of obedience, you could openly avow our engagement to Mr. Mansell, I own that I should feel that we were not drawn into a compromise of sincerity. What this costs me I will not say ; it will be bare existence till we meet at Scarborough.

‘Your own, J. R. F. D.’

Having written this and deposited it in the Ebbscreek post-office, James bethought himself that his submissive cousin had thrown himself on the floor, with his bag for a pillow, trying to make the most of the few moments of rest before the midnight journey. Seized with compunction, James exclaimed,—‘There, old fellow, we will stay to-night.’

‘Thank you—’ He was too sleepy for more.

The delay was recompensed. James was trying to persuade Louis to rouse himself to be revived by bread-and-cheese and beer, and could extort nothing but a drowsy repetition of the rhyme, in old days the war-cry of the Grammar-school against the present head-master,—

‘The Welshman had liked to be choked by a mouse,
But he pulled him out by the tail,—’

when an alarum came in the shape of a little grinning boy from Beauchastel, with a note on which James had nearly laid hands, as he saw the writing, though the address was to the Viscount Fitzjocelyn.

‘You may have it,’ said Louis. ‘If anything were wanting, the coincidence proves that you were cut out for one another. I rejoice that the moon does not stoop from her sphere.’

‘MY DEAR COUSIN,—I trust to you to prevent Mr. F. Dynevor from being hurt or disappointed ; and, indeed, I scarcely think he will, though I should not avail myself of the permission for meeting him so kindly intended. I saw at once that you felt as I did, and as I know he will. He would not like me to have cause to blush before my kind friends—to know that I had acted a deceit, nor to set an example to my sisters for which they might not understand the justification. I know that you will obtain my pardon, if needed ; and to be assured of it, would be all that would be required to complete the grateful happiness of

‘ISABEL.’

The boy had orders not to wait ; and these being seconded by fears of something that ‘walked’ in Ebbscreek wood after dark, he was gone before an answer could be thought of. It mattered the less, since Isabel must receive James’s note early in the morning ; and so, in fact, she did—and she was blushing over it, and feeling as if she could never have borne to meet his eye but for the part she had fortunately taken, when Louisa tapped

at her door, with a message that Mr. Mansell wished to speak with her, if she were ready.

She went down-stairs still in a glow, and her old friend's first words were a compliment on her roses, so pointed, that she doubted for a moment whether he did not think them suspicious, especially as he put his hands behind his back, and paced up and down the room for some moments. He then came towards her, and said, in a very kind tone, 'Isabel, my dear, I sent for you first, because I knew your own mother very well, my dear; and though Lady Conway is very kind, and has always done you justice,—that I will always say for her,—yet there are times when it may make a difference to a young woman whether she has her own mother or not.'

Isabel's heart was beating. She was certain that some discovery had been made, and longed to explain; but she was wise enough not to speak in haste, and waited to see how the old gentleman would finally break it to her. He blundered on a little longer, becoming more confused and distressed every minute, and at last came to the point abruptly. 'In short, Isabel, my dear, what can you have done to set people saying that you have been corresponding with the young men at Ebbscreek?'

'I sent a note to my Cousin Fitzjocelyn last night,' said Isabel, with such calmness, that the old gentleman fairly stood with his mouth open, looking at her aghast.

'Fitzjocelyn! Then it is Fitzjocelyn, is it?' he exclaimed. 'Then, why could he not set about it openly and honourably? Does his father object? I would not have thought it of you, Isabel, nor of the lad neither!'

'You need not think it, dear Mr. Mansell. There is nothing between Lord Fitzjocelyn and myself but the warmest friendship.'

'Isabel! Isabel! why are you making mysteries? I do not wish to pry into your affairs. I would have trusted you anywhere; but when it comes round to me that you have been sending a private messenger to one of the young gentlemen there, I don't know what to be at! I would not believe Mrs. Mansell at first; but I saw the boy, and he said you had sent him yourself. My dear, you may mean very rightly—I am sure you do; but you must not set people talking! It is not acting rightly by me, Isabel; but I would not care for that, if it were acting rightly by yourself.' And he gazed at her with a piteous, perplexed expression.

'Let me call mamma,' said Isabel.

'As you will, my dear; but cannot you let the simple truth come out between you and your own blood-relation, without all her words to come between? Can't you, Isabel? I am sure you and I shall understand each other.'

'That we shall,' replied Isabel, warmly. 'I have given her no promise. Dear Mr. Mansell, I have wished all along that you should know that I am engaged, with her full consent, to Mr. Frost Dynevor.'

'To the little black tutor!' cried Mr. Mansell, recoiling, but recollecting himself. 'I beg your pardon, my dear; he may be a very good man; but what becomes of all this scrambling over barricades with the young lord?'

Isabel described the true history of her engagement; and it was received with a long, low whistle, by no means too complimentary.

'And what makes him come and hide in holes and corners, if this is all with your mamma's good-will?'

'Mamma thought you would be displeased; she insisted on taking her own time for breaking it to you,' said Isabel.

'Was there ever a woman but must have her mystery? Well, I should have liked him better if he had not given in to it!'

'He never did!' said Isabel, indignant enough to disclose in full the whole arrangement made by Lady Conway's manœuvres and lax good-nature. 'I knew it would never do,' she added, 'though I could not say so before her and Fitzjocelyn. My note was to tell them to: and look here, Mr. Mansell, this is what Mr. Dynevor had already written before receiving mine.'

She held it out proudly; and Mr. Mansell, making an unwilling sound between his teeth, took it from her; but, as he read, his countenance changed, and he exclaimed, 'Ha! very well! This is something like! So that's it, is it? You and he would not combine to cheat the old man, like a pair of lovers in a trumpery novel!'

'No, indeed!' said Isabel; 'that would be a bad way of beginning.'

'Where is the young fellow?—at Ebbscreek, did you say? I'll tell you what, Isabel,' with his hand on the bell, 'I'll have out the dog-cart this minute, and fetch him home to breakfast, to meet my lady when she comes down-stairs, if it be only for the sake of showing that I like plain dealing!'

Isabel could only blush, smile, look doubtful, and yet so very happy and grateful, that Mr. Mansell became cautious, lest his impulse should have carried him too far; and, after having ordered the vehicle to be prepared, he caught her by the hand, and detained her, saying, 'Mind you, Miss, you are not to take this for over-much. I'm afraid it is a silly business, and I did not want you to throw yourself away on a schoolmaster. I must see and talk to the man myself; but I won't have anything that's not open and above-board, and that my lady shall see for once in her life!'

'I'm not afraid,' said Isabel, smiling. 'James will make his own way with you.'

Isabel ran away to excuse and explain her confession to Lady Conway; while Mr. Mansell indulged in another whistle, and then went to inform his wife that he was afraid the girl had been making a fool of herself; but it was not Lady Conway's fault that she was nothing worse, and he was resolved, whatever

he did, to show that honesty was the only thing that would go down with him.

The boat was rocking on the green waves, and Louis was in the act of waving an adieu to deaf Mrs. Hannaford, when a huntsman's halloo caused James to look round and behold Mr. Mansell standing up in his dog-cart, making energetic signals with his whip.

He had meant to be very guarded, and wait to judge of James before showing that he approved; but the excitement of the chase betrayed him into a glow of cordiality, and he shook hands with vehemence.

'That's right!—just in time! Jump in, and come home to breakfast. So you wouldn't be a party to my lady's tricks!--just like her—just as she wheedled poor Conway. I will let her see how I esteem plain dealing! I don't say that I see my way through this business; but we'll talk it over together, and settle matters without my lady.'

James hardly knew where he was, between joy and surprise. The invitation was extended to his companion; but Fitzjocelyn discerned that both James and Mr. Mansell would prefer being left to themselves; he had a repugnance to an immediate discussion with the one aunt, and was in haste to carry the tidings to the other: and besides, it was becoming possible that letters might arrive from the travellers. Actuated by all these motives, he declined the offer of hospitality, and rowed across to Bickley-pool, enlightening the Captain on the state of affairs as far as he desired.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE THIRD TIME

Tho' this was fair, and that was braw,
And yon the toast of all the town,
I sighed and said, amang them a',
Ye are not Mary Morison.—BURNS

MRS. FROST and Louis were very merry over the result of Lady Conway's stratagems, and sat up indulging in bright anticipations until so late an hour, that Louis was compelled to relinquish his purpose of going home that night, but he persisted in walking to Ormersfield before breakfast, that he might satisfy himself whether there were any letters.

It was a brisk October morning, the sportsman's gun and whistle re-echoing from the hill-sides; where here and there appeared the dogs careering along over green turnip-fields or across amber stubble. The little Northwold trees, in dark, sober tints of brown and purple, hung over the gray wall, tinted by hoary lichen; and as Louis entered the Ormersfield field-paths, and plunged into his own Ferny dell, the long grass and brackens hung over the path, weighed down with silvery dew,

and the large cavernous web of the autumnal spider was all one thick flake of wet.

If he could not enter the ravine without thankfulness for his past escape, neither could he forget gratitude to her who had come to his relief from hopeless agony! He quickened his pace, in the earnest longing for tidings, which had seized him, even to heart-sickness.

It was the reaction of the ardour and excitement that had so long possessed him. The victory had been gained—he had been obliged to leave James to work in his own cause, and would be no longer wanted in the same manner by his cousin. The sense of loneliness, and of the want of an object, came strongly upon him as he walked through the prim old solitary garden, and looked up at the dreary windows of the house, almost reluctant to enter, as long as it was without Mary's own serene atmosphere of sympathy and good sense, her precious offices of love, her clear steady eyes, even in babyhood his trustworthy counsellors.

Was it a delusion of fancy, acting on reflections in the glass, that, as he mounted the steps from the lawn, depicted Mary's figure through the dining-room windows? Nay, the table was really laid for breakfast—a female figure was actually standing over the tea-chest.

'A scene from the *Vicar of Wakefield* deluding me,' decided Louis, advancing to the third window, which was open.

It was Mary Ponsonby.

'Mary!'

'You here?—They said you were not at home!'

'My father?—Where?'

'He is not come down. He is as well as possible. We came at eleven last night. I found I was not wanted,' added Mary, with a degree of agitation, that made him conclude that she had lost her father.

One step he made to find the Earl, but too much excited to move away or to stand still, he came towards her, wrung her hand in a more real way than in his first bewildered surprise, and exclaimed in transport, 'O Mary! Mary! to have you back again!' then, remembering his inference, added, low and gravely, 'It makes me selfish—I was not thinking of your grief.'

'Never mind,' said Mary, smiling, though her eyes overflowed, 'I must be glad to be at home again, and such a welcome as this—'

'O Mary! Mary!' he cried, nearly beside himself, 'I have not known what to do without you! You will believe it now, won't you?—oh, won't you?'

Mary would have been a wonderful person had she not instantly and utterly forgotten all her conclusions from Frampton's having declared him gone to Beauchastel for an unlimited time; but all she did was to turn away her crimson tearful face, and reply, 'Your father would not wish it now.'

'Then the speculations have failed? So much the better!'

'No, no! he must tell you—'

She was trying to withdraw her hand, when Lord Ormersfield opened the door, and in the moment of his amazed 'Louis!' Mary had fled.

'What is it? oh! what is it, father?' cried Louis for all greeting; 'why can she say you would not wish it now?'

'Wish it? wish what?' asked the Earl, without the intuitive perception of the meaning of the pronoun.

'What you have always wished—Mary and me—what is the only happiness that life can offer me!'

'If I wished it a year ago, I could only wish it the more now,' said the Earl. 'But how is this?—I fully believed you committed to Miss Conway.'

'Miss Conway! Miss Conway!' burst out Louis, in a frenzy. 'Because Jem Frost was in love with her himself, he fancied every one else must be the same, and now he will be married to her before Christmas, so *that's* disposed of. As to my feeling for her a particle, a shred of what I do for Mary, it was a mere fiction—a romance, an impossibility.'

'I do not understand you, Louis. Why did you not find this out before?'

'Mrs. Ponsonby called it my duty to test my feelings, and I have tested them. That one is a beautiful poet's dream. Mary is a woman, the only woman I can ever love. Not an hour but I have felt it; and now, father, what does she mean?'

'She means, poor girl, what only her own scrupulous delicacy could regard as an objection, but what renders me still more desirous to have a right to protect her. The cause of our return—'

'How? I thought her father was dead.'

'Far worse. At Valparaiso we met Robson, the confidential agent. I learnt from him that Mr. Ponsonby had hardly waited for her mother's death to marry a Limenian, a person whom everything pointed out as unfit to associate with his daughter. Even Robson, cautious as he was, said he could not undertake to recommend Miss Ponsonby to continue her journey.'

'And this was all?' exclaimed Louis, too intent on his own views for anything but relief.

'All? Is it not enough to set her free? She acquiesced in my judgment that she could do no otherwise than return. She wrote to her father, and I sent three lines to inform him that, under the circumstances, I fulfilled my promise to her mother by taking her home. I had nearly made her promise that, should we find you about to form an establishment of your own, she would consider herself as my child; but—'

'Oh, father! how shall we make her believe you care nothing for her scruple? The wretched man! But—oh! where is she?'

'It does not amount to a scruple in her case,' deliberately resumed the Earl. 'I always knew what Ponsonby was, and

nothing from him could surprise me—even such an outrage on feeling and decency. Besides, he has effectually shut himself out of society, and degraded himself beyond the power of interfering with you. For the rest, Mary is already, in feeling, so entirely my child, that to have the right to call her so has always been my fondest wish. And, Louis, the months I have spent with her have not diminished my regard. My Mary! she will have a happier lot than her mother!’

The end of the speech rewarded Louis for the conflict by which he had kept himself still to listen to the beginning. Lord Ormersfield had pity on him, and went in search of Mary; while he, remembering former passages, felt that his father might be less startling and more persuasive, but began to understand what James must have suffered in committing his affairs to another.

The Earl found Mary in what had been her mother’s sitting-room, striving to brace her resolution by recalling the conversation that had taken place there on a like occasion. But alas! how much more the heart had now to say! How much it felt as if the only shelter or rest in the desolate world was in the light of the blue eyes whose tender sunshine had been on her for one instant!

Yet she began firmly—‘If you please, would you be so kind as to let me go to Aunt Melicent?’

‘By and by, my dear, when you think fit.’

‘Oh, then, at once, and without seeing any one, please!’

‘Nay, Mary,’ with redoubled gentleness, ‘there is one who cannot let you go without seeing him. Mary, you will not disappoint my poor boy again. You will let him be an amendment in my scheme.’

‘You have been always most kind to me, but you cannot really like this.’

‘You forget that it has been my most ardent wish from the moment I saw you what only your mother’s child could be.’

‘That was before—No, I ought not! Yours is not a family to bring disgrace into.’

‘I cannot allow you to speak thus. I knew your trials at home when first I wished you to be my son’s wife, and my opinion is unchanged, except by my increased wish to have the first claim to you.’

‘Lord Ormersfield,’ said Mary, collecting herself, ‘only one thing. Tell me, as if we were indifferent persons, is this a connection such as would do Louis any harm? I trust you to answer.’

He paced along the room, and she tried to control her trembling. He came back and spoke: ‘No, Mary. If he were a stranger, I should give the same advice. Your father’s own family is unexceptionable; and those kind of things, so far off—few will ever hear of them, and no one will attach consequence to them. If that be your only scruple, it does you infinite

credit ; but I can entirely remove it. What might be an injury to you, single, would be of comparatively little importance to him.'

'Miss Conway,' faltered Mary, who could never remember her when in Louis's presence.

'A mere delusion of our own. There was nothing in it. He calls you the only woman who can make him happy, as I always knew you were. He must explain all. You will come to him, my dear child.'

Mary resisted no more ; he led her down-stairs, and left her within the dining-room door.

'Mary, you will now—' was all Louis said ; but she let him draw her into his arms, and she rested against his breast, as when he had come to comfort her in the great thunderstorm in auld lang-syne. She felt herself come at length to the shelter and repose for which her heart had so long yearned, in spite of her efforts, and as if the world had nothing more to offer of peace or joy.

'Oh, Mary, how I have wanted you ! You believe in me now !'

'I am sure mamma would !' murmured Mary.

He could have poured forth a torrent of affection, but the suspicion of a footstep made her start from him ; and the next moment she was herself, glowing, indeed, and half crying with happiness, but alarmed at her own agitation, and struggling to resume her commonplace manner.

'There's your father not had a morsel of breakfast !' she exclaimed, hurrying back to her tea-cups, whose ringing betrayed her trembling hand. 'Call him, Louis.'

'Must I go ?' said Louis, coming to assist in a manner that threatened deluge and destruction.

'Oh, yes, go ! I shall be able to speak to you when you come back.'

He had only to go into the verandah. His father was watching at the library window, and they wrung each other's hand in gladness beyond utterance.

Mary had seated herself in the solid stately chair, with the whole entrenchment of tea equipage before her. They knew it signified that she was to be unmolested ; they took their places, and the Earl carved ham, and Louis cut bread, and Mary poured out tea in the most matter-of-fact manner, hazarding nothing beyond such questions as, 'May I give you an egg ?'

Then curiosity began to revive : Louis ventured, 'Where did you land ?' and his father made answer, 'At Liverpool, yesterday,' and how the Custom-house had detained them, and he had, therefore, brought Mary straight home, instead of stopping with her at Northwold, at eleven o'clock, to disturb Mrs. Frost.

'You would have found us up,' said Louis.

'You were sleeping at the Terrace ?'

'Yes, I walked here this morning.'

'Then your ankle must be pretty well,' was Mary's first contribution to the conversation.

'Quite well enough for all useful purposes,' said Louis, availing himself of the implied permission to turn towards her.

'But, Louis,' suddenly exclaimed the Earl, 'did you not tell me something extraordinary about James Frost? Whom did you say he was going to marry?'

'Isabel Conway.'

Never was his love of electrifying more fully gratified! Lord Ormersfield was surprised into an emphatic interjection, and inquiry whether they were all gone mad.

'Not that I am aware of,' said Louis. 'Perhaps you have not heard that Mr. Lester is going to retire, and Jem has the school?'

'Then, it must be Calcott and the trustees who are out of their senses.'

'Do you not consider it an excellent appointment?'

'It might be so some years hence,' said the Earl. 'I am afraid it will tie him down to a second-rate affair, when he might be doing better; and the choice is the last thing I should have expected from Calcott.'

'He opposed it. He wanted to bring in a very ordinary style of person from — School, but Jem's superiority and the general esteem for my aunt carried the day.'

'What did Ramsbotham and his set do?'

'They were better than could have been hoped; they gave us their votes when they found their man could not get in.'

'Ha! As long as that fellow is against Calcott, he cares little whom he supports. I am sorry that Calcott should be defeated, even for James's sake. How did Richardson vote?'

'He was doubtful at first, but I brought him over.'

Lord Ormersfield gave a quick, searching glance as he said, 'James Frost did not make use of our interest in this matter.'

'Jem never did. He and my aunt held back, and were unwilling to oppose the Squire. They would have given it up, but for me. Father, I never supposed you could be averse to my doing my utmost for Jem, when all his prospects were at stake.'

'I should have imagined that James was too well aware of my sentiments to allow it.'

What a cloud on the happy morning!

Louis eagerly exclaimed: 'James is the last person to be blamed! He and my aunt were always trying to stop me, but I would not listen to their scruples. I knew his happiness depended on his success, and I worked for him in spite of himself. If I did wrong, I can only be very sorry; but I cannot readily believe that I transgressed by setting the question before people in a right light. Only, whose fault soever it was, it was not Jem's.'

Lord Ormersfield had not the heart to see one error in his son on such a day as this, more especially as Mary peeped out behind the urn to judge of his countenance, and he met her pleading eyes, swimming in tears.

'No, I find no fault,' he kindly said. 'Young ardent spirits may be excused for outrunning the bounds that their elders might impose. But you have not removed my amazement. James intending to marry on the grammar-school!—it cannot be worth 300*l.* a year.'

'Isabel is satisfied. She never desired anything but a quiet, simple, useful life.'

'Your Aunt Catharine delighted, of course? No doubt of that; but what has come to Lady Conway?'

'She cannot help it, and makes the best of it. She gave us very little trouble.'

'Ah! her own daughter is growing up,' said the Earl, significantly.

'Isabel is very fond of Northwold,' said Mary, feeling that Louis was wanting her sympathy. 'She used to wish she could settle there—with how little consciousness!'

'If I had to judge in such a case,' said Lord Ormersfield, thoughtfully, 'I should hesitate to risk a woman's happiness with a temper such as that of James Frost.'

'Oh, father!' cried Louis, indignantly.

'I suspect,' said Lord Ormersfield, smiling, 'that of late years, James's temper has been more often displayed towards me than towards you.'

'A certain proof how safe his wife will be,' returned Louis.

His father shook his head, and looking from one to the other of the young people, congratulated himself that here, at least, there were no perils of that description. He asked how long the attachment had existed.

'From the moment of first sight,' said Louis: 'the fine spark was lighted on the Euston Square platform; and it was not much later with her. He filled up her *beau idéal* of goodness—'

'And, in effect, all Lady Conway's pursuit of you threw them together,' said Lord Ormersfield, much entertained.

'Lady Conway has been their very best friend, without intending it. It would not have come to a crisis by this time, if she had not taken me to Paris. It would have been a pity if the catastrophe of the barricades had been all for nothing.'

Lord Ormersfield and Mary here broke out in amazement at themselves, for having hitherto been oblivious of the intelligence that had greeted them on their first arrival, when Frampton had informed them of Lord Fitzjocelyn's wound and gallant conduct, and his father had listened to the story like the fastening of a rivet in Miss Conway's chains, and Mary with a flush of unselfish pride that Isabel had been taught to value her hero. They both claimed the true and detailed account, as if they had hitherto been defrauded of it, and insisted on hearing what had happened to him.

'I dare say you know best,' said Louis, lazily. 'I have heard so many different accounts of late, that I really am beginning

to forget which is the right one, and rather incline to the belief that Delaford brought a rescue or two with his revolver, and carried us into a fortress where my aunt had secured the windows with feather-beds—'

'You had better make haste and tell, that the true edition may be preserved,' said Mary, rallying her spirits in her eagerness.

'I have begun to understand why there never yet has been an authentic account of a great battle,' said Louis. 'Life would make me coincide with Sir Robert Walpole's judgment on history. All I am clear about is, that even a Red Republican is less red than he is painted; that Isabel Conway is fit to visit the sentinels in a beleaguere^d castle—a noble being— But oh, Mary! did I not long sorely after you when it came to the wounded knight part of the affair! I am more sure of that than of anything else!'

Mary blushed, but her tender heart was chiefly caring to know how much he had been hurt, and so the whole story was unfolded by due questioning; and the Earl had full and secret enjoyment of the signal defeat of his dear sister-in-law, the one satisfaction on which every one seemed agreed.

It was a melancholy certainty that Mary must go to Mrs. Frost, but the Earl deferred the moment by sending the carriage with an entreaty that she would come herself to fetch her guest. Mary talked of writing a note; but the autumn sun shone cheerily on the steps, and Louis wiled her into seating herself on the upper step, while he reclined on the lower ones, as they had so often been placed when this was his only way of enjoying the air. The sky was clear, the air had the still calm of autumn; the evergreens and the yellow-fringed elms did not stir a leaf—only a large heavy yellow plane leaf now and then detached itself by its own weight, and silently floated downwards. Mary sat, without wishing to utter a word to disturb the unwonted tranquillity, the rest so precious after her months of sea-voyage, her journey, and her agitations. But Louis wanted her seal of approval to all his past doings, and soon began on their inner and deeper story, ending with, 'Tell me whether you think I was right, my own dear governess—'

'Oh, no, you must never call me that any more.'

'It is a name belonging to my happiest days.'

'It was only in play. It reverses the order of things. I must look up to you.'

'If you can!' said Louis, playfully, slipping down to a lower step.

A tear burst out as Mary said, 'Mamma said it must never be that way.' Then recovering, she added, 'I beg your pardon, Louis; I was treating it as earnest. I think I am not quite myself to-day; I will go to my room!'

'No, no, don't,' he said; 'I will not harass you with my gladness, dearest.' He stepped indoors, brought out a book, and

when Mrs. Frost arrived to congratulate and be congratulated, she found Mary still on the step, gazing on without seeing the trees and flowers, listening without attending to the rich, soothing flow of Lope de Vega's beautiful devotional sonnets, in majestic Spanish, in Louis's low, sweet voice.

CHAPTER XXV

MISTS

Therefore thine eye through mist of many days
Shines bright; and beauty, like a lingering rose,
Sits on thy cheek, and in thy laughter plays;
While wintry frosts have fallen on thy foes,
And, like a vale that breathes the western sky,
Thy heart is green, though summer is gone by.—F. TENNYSON

HAPPY Aunt Kitty!—the centre, the confidante of so much love! Perhaps her enjoyment was the most keen and pure of all, because the most free from self—the most devoid of those cares for the morrow, which, after besetting middle life, often so desert old age as to render it as free and fresh as childhood. She had known the worst: she had been borne through by heart-whole faith and love; she had seen how often frettings for the future were vain, and experienced that anticipation is worse than reality. Where there was true affection and sound trust, she could not, would not, and did not fear for those she loved.

James went backwards and forwards in stormy happiness. He had come to a comfortable understanding with old Mr. Mansell, who had treated him with respect and cordiality from the first, giving him to understand that Isabel's further expectations only amounted to a legacy of a couple of thousands on his own death, and that meantime he had little or no hope of helping him in his profession. He spoke of Isabel's expensive habits, and the danger of her finding it difficult to adapt herself to a small income; and though, of course, he might as well have talked to the wind as to either of the lovers, his remonstrance was so evidently conscientious as not to be in the least offensive, and Mr. Frost Dynevor was graciously pleased to accept him as a worthy relation.

All was smooth likewise with Lady Conway. She and Mr. Mansell outwardly appeared utterly unconscious of each other's proceedings, remained on the most civil terms, and committed their comments and explanations to Mrs. Mansell, who administered them according to her own good-natured, gossiping humour, and sided with whichever was speaking to her. There was in Lady Conway much kindness and good-humour, always ready to find satisfaction in what was inevitable, and willing to see all at ease and happy around her—a quality which she shared with Louis, and which rendered her as warm and even

caressing to 'our dear James' as if he had been the most welcome suitor in the world; and she often sincerely congratulated herself on the acquisition of a sensible gentleman to consult on business, and so excellent a brother for Walter. It was not falsehood, it was real amiability; and it was an infinite comfort in the courtship, especially the courtship of a Pen-dragon. As to the two young sisters, their ecstasy was beyond description, only alloyed by the grief of losing Isabel, and this greatly mitigated by schemes of visits to Northwold.

The marriage was fixed for the end of November, so as to give time for a little tranquillity before the commencement of James's new duties. As soon as this intelligence arrived, Mrs. Frost removed herself, Mary, and her goods into the House Beautiful, that No. 5 might undergo the renovations which, poor thing! had been planned twenty years since, when poor Henry's increasing family and growing difficulties had decided her that she could 'do without them' one year more.

'Even should Miss Conway not like to keep house with the old woman,' said she, by way of persuading herself she had no such expectation, 'it was her duty to keep the place in repair.'

That question was soon at rest: Isabel would be but too happy to be allowed to share her home, and truly James would hardly have attached himself to a woman who could not regard it as a privilege to be with the noble old lady. Clara was likewise to be taken home; Isabel undertook to complete her education, and school and tuition were both to be removed from the contemplation of the happy girl, whose letters had become an unintelligible rhapsody of joy and affection.

Isabel had three thousand pounds of her own, which, with that valuable freehold, Dynevor Terrace, James resolved should be settled on herself, speaking of it with such solemn importance as to provoke the gravity of those accustomed to deal with larger sums. With the interest of her fortune he meant to insure his life, that, as he told Louis, with gratified prudence, there might be no repetition of his own case, and his family might never be a burden on any one.

The income of the school, with their former well-husbanded means, was affluence for the style to which he aspired; and his grandmother, though her *menus plaisirs* had once doubled her present revenue, regarded it as the same magnificent advance, and was ready to launch into the extravagance of an additional servant, and of fitting up the long-disused drawing-room, and the dining-parlour, hitherto called the schoolroom, kicked and hacked by thirty years of boys. She and Clara would betake themselves to their present little sitting-room, and make the drawing-room pleasant and beautiful for the bride.

And in what a world of upholstery did not the dear old lady spend the autumn months! How surpassingly happy was Jane, and how communicative about Cheveleigh! and how pleased and delighted in little Charlotte's promotion!

And Charlotte ! She ought to have been happy, with her higher wages and emancipation from the more unpleasant work, with the expectation of one whom she admired so enthusiastically as Miss Conway, and, above all, with the long, open-hearted, affectionate letter which Miss Ponsonby had put into her hand with so kind a smile. Somehow, it made her do nothing but cry ; she felt unwilling to sit down and answer it ; and, as if it were out of perverseness, when she was in Mrs. Martha's very house, and when there was so much to be done, she took the most violent fit of novel-reading that had ever been known ; and when engaged in working or cleaning alone, chanted dismal ballads of the type of 'Alonzo the brave and the fair Imogene,' till Mrs. Martha declared that she was just as bad as an old dumbledore, and not worth half so much.

One day, however, Miss Ponsonby called her into her room, to tell her that a parcel was going to Lima, in case she wished to send anything by it. Miss Ponsonby spoke so kindly, and yet so delicately, and Charlotte blushed and faltered, and felt that she *must* write now !

'I have been wishing to tell you, Charlotte,' added Mary, kindly, 'how much we like Mr. Madison. There were some very undersirable people among the passengers, who might easily have led him astray ; but the captain and mate both spoke to Lord Ormersfield in the highest terms of his behaviour. He never missed attending prayers on the Sundays ; and, from all I could see, I do fully believe that he is a sincerely good, religious man ; and, if he keeps on as he has begun, I think you are very happy in belonging to him.'

Charlotte only curtsied and thanked ; but it was wonderful how those kind, sympathizing words blew off at once the whole mists of nonsense and fancy. Tom was the sound, good, religious man to whom her heart and her troth were given ; the other was no such thing, a mere flatterer, and she had known it all along. She would never think of him again, and she was sure he would not think of her. Truth had dispelled all the fancied sense of hypocrisy and double-dealing : she sat down and wrote to Tom as if Delaford had never existed, and forthwith returned to be herself again, at least for the present.

Poor Mary ! she might speak cheerfully, but her despatches were made up with a trembling heart. Louis and Mary missed the security and felicity that seemed so perfect with James and Isabel. In the first place, nothing could be fixed without further letters, although the Earl had tried to persuade Mary that her father had virtually forfeited all claim to her obedience, and that she ought to proceed as if in fact an orphan, and secure herself from being harassed by him, by hastening her marriage. Of this she would not hear, and she was exceedingly grateful to Louis for abstaining from pressing her, as well as for writing to Mr. Ponsonby in terms against which no exception could be taken.

Till secure of his consent, she would not consider her engagement as more than conditional, nor consent to its being mentioned to *any one*. If Isabel knew it, that was James's fault. Even the Faithfull sisters were kept in ignorance; and she trusted thus to diminish the wrong that she felt her secrecy to be doing to Aunt Melicent, who was so much vexed and annoyed at her return, that she dreaded exceedingly the effect of the knowledge of her engagement. Miss Ponsonby was convinced that the news had been exaggerated, and insisted that but for Lord Ormersfield's dislike, it would have been further sifted; and she wrote to Mary to urge her coming to her to await the full tidings, instead of delaying among her father's avowed enemies.

Mary settled this point by mentioning her promise to Mrs. Frost to remain with her until her grandchildren should be with her; and Miss Ponsonby's correspondence ceased after a dry, though still kind letter, which did not make Mary more willing to bestow her confidence, but left her feeling in her honest heart as if she were dealing insincerely by Aunt Melicent.

The discretion and reserve rendered requisite by the concealment were such as to be very tormenting even to so gentle a temper as that of Louis, since they took from him all the privileges openly granted to the cousin, and scarcely left him those of the friend. She, on whose arm he had leant all last summer, would not now walk with him without an escort; and, even with Mrs. Frost beside her, shrank from Ormersfield like forbidden ground. Her lively, frank tone of playful command had passed away; nay, she almost shrank from his confidence, withheld her counsel, and discouraged his constant visits. He could not win from her one of her broad fearless comments on his past doings; and in his present business, the taking possession of Inglewood, the choice of stock, and the appointment of a bailiff, though she listened and sympathized, and answered questions, she volunteered no opinions, she expressed no wishes, she would not come to see.

Poor Louis was often mortified into doubts of his own ability to interest or make her happy; but he was very patient. If disappointed one day, he was equally eager the next; he submitted obediently to her restrictions, and was remorseful when he forgot or transgressed; and they had real, soothing, comforting talks just often enough to be tantalizing, and yet to convince him that all the other unsatisfactory meetings and partings were either his own fault, or that of some untoward circumstance.

He saw, as did the rest, that Mary's spirits had received a shock not easily to be recovered. The loss of her mother was weighing on her more painfully than in the first excitement; and the step her father had taken, insulting her mother, degrading himself, and rending away her veil of filial honour, had

exceedingly overwhelmed and depressed her ; while sorrow hung upon her with the greater permanence and oppression from her strong self-control, and dislike to manifestation.

All this he well understood ; and, reverent towards her feeling, he laid aside all trifling, and waited on her mood with the tenderest watchfulness. When she could bear it, they would dwell together on the precious recollections of her mother ; and sometimes she could even speak of her father, and relate instances of his affection for herself, and all his other redeeming traits of character ; most thankful to Louis for accepting him on her word, and never uttering one word of him which she could wish unsaid.

What Louis did not see, was that the very force of her own affection was what alarmed Mary, and caused her reserve. To a mind used to balance and regulation, any sensation so mighty and engrossing appeared wrong ; and repressed as her attachment had been, it was the more absorbing now that he was all that was left to her. Admiration, honour, gratitude, old childish affection, and caressing elder-sisterly protection, all flowed in one deep, strong current ; but the very depth made her diffident. She could not imagine the whole reciprocated, and she feared to be importunate. If the day was no better than a weary turmoil, save when his voice was in her ear, his eyes wistfully bent on her ; the more carefully did she restrain all expression of hope of seeing him to-morrow, lest she should be exacting and detain him from projects of his own. If it was pride and delight to her to watch his graceful, agile figure spring on horseback, she would keep herself from the window, lest he should feel oppressed by her pursuing him ; and when she found her advice sought after as his law, she did not venture to proffer it. She was uncomfortable in finding the rule committed to her, and all the more because Lord Ormersfield, who had learnt to talk to her so openly that she thought he sometimes confounded her with her mother, used in all his schemes to appear to take it for granted that she should share with him in the managing, consulting headship of the house, leaving Louis as something to be petted and cared for as a child, without a voice in their decisions. These conversations used to make her almost jealous on Louis's account, and painfully recall some of her mother's apprehensions.

That was the real secret source of all her discomfort—namely, the misgiving lest she had been too ready to follow the dictates of her own heart. Would her mother have been satisfied ? Had not her fondness and her desolation prevailed, where, for Louis's own sake she should have held back ? Every time she felt herself the elder in heart, every time she feared to have disappointed him, every time she saw that his liveliness was repressed by her mournfulness, she feared that she was letting him sacrifice himself. And still more did she question her conduct towards her father. She had only gradually become

aware of the extent of the mutual aversion between him and the Earl ; and Miss Ponsonby's reproaches awakened her to the fear that she had too lightly given credence to hostile evidence. Her affection would fain have justified him ; and, forgetting the difficulties of personal investigation in such a case, she blamed herself for having omitted herself to question the confidential clerk, and having left all to Lord Ormersfield, who, cool and wary as he ordinarily was, would be less likely to palliate Mr. Ponsonby's errors than those of any other person. Her heart grew sick as she counted the weeks ere she could hear from Lima.

None of her troubles were allowed to interfere with Mrs. Frost's peace. Outwardly, she was cheerful and helpful ; equable, though less lively. Those carpets and curtains, tables and chairs, which were the grand topics at the House Beautiful, were neither neglected nor treated with resigned impatience. Mary's taste, counsel, and needle did good service ; her hearty interest and consideration were given to the often-turned volume of designs for bedsteads, sofas, and window-curtains ; and Miss Mercy herself had hardly so many resources for making old furniture new. Many of her happiest half-hours with Louis were spent as she sewed the stiff slippery chintz, and he held the curtain rings, while Aunt Catharine went to inspect the workmen ; and many a time were her cares forgotten, and her active spirits resumed, while Louis acted carpenter under her directions, and rectified errors of the workmen. It might not be poetical, but the French sky-blue paper, covered with silvery fern-leaves, that Louis took such pains to procure, and the china door-handles that he brought over in his pockets, and the great map which Mary pasted over the obstinate spot of damp in the vestibule, were the occasions of the greatest blitheness and merriment that they shared together. Much did they enjoy the prediction that James would not know his own house ; greatly did they delight in sowing surprises, and in obtaining Aunt Catharine's never-failing start of well-pleased astonishment. Each wedding present was an event :—Mr. Mansell's piano, which disconcerted all previous designs ; Lord Ormersfield's handsome plate ; and many a minor gift from old scholars, delighted to find an occasion when an offering would not be an offence. Even Mr. Calcott gave a valuable inkstand, in which Mrs. Frost and Louis beheld something of forgiveness.

Isabel had expressed a wish that Mary should be one of her bridesmaids. A wedding was not the scene which poor Mary wished to witness at present ; but she saw Louis bent on having her with him, and would not vex him by reluctance. He had also prevailed on his father to be present, though the Earl was much afraid of establishing a precedent, and being asked to act the part of father on future contingencies. There was only one bride, as he told Louis, whom he could ever *wish* to give away. However, that trouble was spared him by Mr. Mansell : but

still Louis would not let him off, on the plea that James's side of the house should make as imposing a demonstration as possible.

Mrs. Frost was less manageable. Though warmly invited by the Conways, and fondly entreated by her grandson, she shook her head, and said she was past those things, and that the old mother always stayed at home to cook the wedding dinner. She should hear all when Clara came home the next day, and should be ready for the happy pair when they would return for Christmas, after a brief stay at Thornton Conway, which Isabel wished James to see, that he might share in all her old associations.

All the rest of the party journeyed to London on a November day; and, in gaslight and gloom, they deposited Mary at her aunt's house in Bryanston Square.

Gaslight was the staple of Hymen's torch the next morning. London was under one of the fogs, of which it is popularly said you may cut them with a knife. The church was in dim twilight; the bride and bridegroom loomed through the haze, and the indistinctness made Clara's fine tall figure appear quite majestic above the heads of the other bridesmaids.

The breakfast was by lamp-light, and the mist looked lurid and grim over the white cake, and no one talked of anything but the comparative density of fogs; and Mr. Mansell's asthma had come on, and his speech was devolved upon Lord Ormersfield, to whom Louis had imprudently promised exemption.

What was worse, Lady Conway had paired them off in the order of precedence; and Louis was a victim to two dowagers, between whom he could neither see nor speak to Mary. He was the more concerned, because he had thought her looking depressed and avoiding his eye.

He tried to believe this caution, but he thought she was also eluding his father, and her whole air gave him a vague uneasiness. The whole party were to dine with Lady Conway; and, trusting in the meantime to discover what was on her spirits, he tried to resign himself to the order of the day, without a farther glimpse of her.

When the married pair took leave, Walter gave his sister a great hug, but had no perception of his office of handing her down-stairs; and it was Eitzjocelyn who gave her his arm, and put her into the carriage, with an augury that the weather would be beautiful when once they had left the fog in London.

She smiled dreamily, and repeated 'beautiful,' as though all were so beautiful already to her that she did not so much as perceive the fog.

James pressed his hand, saying, 'I am glad you are to be the one to be happy next.'

'You do not look so,' said Clara, earnestly.

The two sisters had come partly down-stairs, but their London habits had restrained them from following to the street-door, as

Clara had done ; and now they had rushed up again, while Clara, with one foot on the staircase, looked in her cousin's face, as he tried to smile in answer, and repeated, 'Louis, I hoped you were quite happy.'

'I am,' said Louis, quickly.

'Then why do you look so grave and uneasy?'

'Louis!' said an entreating voice above, and there stood Mary—'Pray say nothing, but call a cab for me, please. No, I am not ill—indeed I am not—but I cannot stay!'

'You look ill! It has been too much for you! Clara, take her—let her lie down quietly,' cried Louis, springing to her side.

'Oh, no, thank you—no,' said Mary, decidedly, though very low; 'I told Lady Conway that I could not stay. I settled it with Aunt Melicent.'

'That aunt of yours—'

'Hush! No, it is for my own sake—my own doing. I cannot bear it any longer! Please let me go!'

'Then I will take you. I saw the brougham waiting. We will go quietly together.'

'No, that must not be.'

'I was thoughtless in urging you to come. The turmoil has been too much. My poor Mary! That is what comes of doing what I like instead of what *you* like. Why don't you always have your own way? Let me come; nay, if you will not, at least let Clara go with you, and come back.'

Mary roused herself at last to speak, as she moved down-stairs—'You need not think of me; there is nothing the matter with me. I promised Aunt Melicent to come home. She is very kind—it is not *that*.'

'You must not tell me not to think. I shall come to inquire. I shall be with you the first thing to-morrow.'

'Yes, you must come to-morrow,' said Mary, in a tone he could not interpret, and a tight lingering grasp on his hand, as he put her into his father's carriage.

He stood hesitating for a moment as it drove off; then, instead of entering the house, walked off quickly in the same direction.

Clara had stood all the time like a statue on the stairs, waiting to see if she were wanted, and gazing intently, with her fingers clasped. When both were gone she drew a long breath, and nodded with her head, whispering to herself, in a grave and critical voice—'That is love!'

She did not see Fitzjocelyn again till nearly dinner-time; and, as he caught her anxious interrogating eye, he came to her and said, very low, 'I was not let in; Miss Ponsonby was engaged, Miss Mary lying down—I believe they never told her I was there.'

'It is all that aunt—horrid woman!'

'Don't talk of it now. I *will* see her to-morrow.'

Clara grieved for him whenever she saw him called on to exert himself to talk; and she even guarded him from the sallies

of his young cousins. Once, when much music and talk was going on, he came and sat by her, and made her tell him how fondly and affectionately she had parted with her schoolfellows; and how some of her old foes had become, as she hoped, friends for life; but she saw his eye fixed and absent even while she spoke, and she left off suddenly. 'Go on,' he said, 'I like to hear;' and with a manifest effort he bent his mind to attend.

'Oh!' thought Clara, as she went up that night—'why will the days one most expects to be happy turn out so much otherwise? However, he will manage to tell me all about it when he and his father take me home to-morrow.'

CHAPTER XXVI

OUTWARD BOUND

The voice which I did more esteem
Than music in her sweetest key—
Those eyes which unto me did seem
More comfortable than the day—
Those now by me, as they have been,
Shall never more be heard or seen.—GEORGE WITHER

IN suspense and impatience, Fitzjocelyn awaited the end of his father's breakfast, that he might hasten to learn what ailed Mary. The post came in, vexing him at first merely as an additional delay, but presently a sound of dissatisfaction attracted his notice to the foreign air of two envelopes which had been forwarded from home.

'Hem!' said the Earl, gravely, 'I am afraid this fellow Ponsonby will give us some trouble.'

'Then Mary had heard from him!' cried Louis. 'She was keeping it from me, not to spoil the day. I must go to her this moment—' but pausing again, 'What is it? He cannot have had my letter!'

'No, but he seems to have anticipated it. Puffed up as they are about these speculations, he imagines me to have brought Mary home for no purpose but to repair our fortunes; and informs me that, in the event of your marriage, she will receive not a farthing beyond her mother's settlements. I am much obliged! It is all I ever thought you would receive; and but for me, it would have been in the bottom of some mine long ago! Do you wish to see what he says?'

Louis caught up the missive. It was the letter of a very angry man, too violent to retain the cold formality which he tried to assume. 'He was beholden to his lordship for his solicitude about his daughter. It was of a piece with other assistance formerly rendered to him in his domestic arrangements, for which he was equally obliged. He was happy to inform his lordship that, in this instance, his precautions had been uncalled

for ; and referred him to a letter which he would receive from Mr. Dynevor by the same mail, for an explanation of the circumstances to which he referred. He had been informed, by undoubted authority, that Lord Fitzjocelyn had done his daughter the honour of soliciting her hand. It might console his lordship to learn that, should the union take place, the whole of his property would be secured to Mrs. Ponsonby, and his daughter's sole fortune would be that which she inherited by her mother's marriage settlements. Possibly this intelligence might lead to a cessation of these flattering attentions.'

'Mrs. Ponsonby ! he can mention her in the same sentence with Mary's mother !' said the Earl.

Louis turned pale as he read, and scarcely breathed as he looked up at his father, dreading that he might so resent the studied affronts as to wish to break off the connection, and that he might have him likewise to contend with ; but on that score he was set at rest. The Earl replied to his exclamation of angry dismay, 'It is little more than I looked for. It is not the first letter I have had from him. I find he has some just cause for offence. The marriage is less disgraceful than I had been led to believe. Here is Oliver Dynevor's testimony.'

Oliver Dynevor's was a succinct business-like letter, certifying his cousin that he had been mistaken in his view of the marriage. Doña Rosa de Lima de Guzman was an orphan of a very respectable family, who had come to spend the year before her intended novitiate at the house of an uncle. She was very young, and Mr. Dynevor believed that the marriage had been hastened by her relations making her feel herself unwelcome, and her own reluctance to return to her convent, and that she might not be aware how very recently Mr. Ponsonby had become a widower. For his own part, he was little used to ladies' society, and could form no judgment of the bride ; but he could assure Lord Ormersfield that she had been guilty of no impropriety ; she was visited by every one ; and that there was no reason against Mary Ponsonby associating with her.

'What could the clerk be thinking of ?' exclaimed Louis.

'My first impression was not taken from the clerk. What I heard first, and in the strongest terms, was from the captain of a ship at Valparaiso. In fact, it was in the mouth of all who had known the family. Robson neither confirmed nor contradicted, and gave me the notion of withholding much from regard for his employer. He lamented the precipitation, but seemed willing to make excuses. He distinctly said, he would not take it on himself to recommend Miss Ponsonby's continuing her journey. He was right. If I had known all this, I should still have brought her home. I must write an apology, as far as her character is concerned ; but, be that as it may, the marriage is atrocious—an insult—a disgrace ! He could not have waited six weeks—'

'But I must go to Mary !' cried Louis, as though reproaching

himself for the delay. 'Oh! that she should have forced herself to that wedding, and spared me!'

'I am coming with you,' said the Earl. 'She will require my personal assurance that all this makes no difference to me.'

'I am more afraid of the difference it may make to her,' said Louis. 'You have never believed how fond she is of her father.'

On arriving, they were ushered into the room where Miss Ponsonby was at breakfast, and a cup of tea and untasted roll showed where her niece had been. She received them with stiff, upright chillness; and to their hope that Mary was not unwell, replied—'Not very well. She had been over-fatigued yesterday, and had followed her advice in going to lie down.'

Louis began to imagine a determination to exclude him, and was eagerly beginning to say that she had asked him to come that morning—could she not see him? when the lady continued, with the same severity—'Until yesterday, I was not aware how much concern Lord Fitzjocelyn had taken in what related to my niece.'

At that moment, when Louis's face was crimson with confusion and impatience, the door was softly pushed ajar, and he heard himself called in low, hoarse tones. Miss Ponsonby was rising with an air of vexed surprise, but he never saw her; and, hastily crossing the room, he shut the door behind him, and followed the form that flitted up the stairs so fast, that he did not come up with her till she had entered the drawing-room, and stood leaning against a chair to gather breath. She was very pale, and her eyes looked as if she had cried all night; but she controlled her voice to say, 'I could not bear that you should hear it from Aunt Melicent.'

'We had letters this morning, dearest. Always thinking for me! But I must think for you. You can hardly stand—'

He would have supported her to the sofa, but she shrank from him; and, leaning more heavily on the chair, said—'Do you not know, Louis, all that must be at an end?'

'I know no such thing. My father is here on purpose to assure you that it makes not the slightest difference to him.'

'Yours! Yes! But oh, Louis!' with a voice that, in its faintness and steadiness, had a sound of anguish—'only think what I allowed him to make me do! To insult my father and his choice! It was a mistake, I know,' she continued, fearing to be unjust and to grieve Louis; 'but a most dreadful one!'

'He says he should have brought you home all the same—' began Louis. 'Mary, you must sit down!' he cried, interrupting himself to come nearer; and she obeyed, sinking into the chair. 'What a state you are in! How could you go through yesterday! How could you be distressed, and not let me know?'

'I could not spoil their wedding-day, that we had wished for so long.'

'Then you had the letter?'

'In the morning. Oh, that I had examined farther! Oh, that I had never come home!'

'Mary! I cannot hear you say so.'

'You would have been spared all this. You were doing very well without me—as you will—'

He cried out with deprecating horror.

'Louis!' she said, imploringly. 'Oh, Louis! do not make it harder for me to do right.'

'Why—what? I don't understand! Your father has not so much as heard how we stand together. He cannot be desiring you to give me up.'

'He—he forbids me to enter on anything of the sort with you. I don't know what made him think it possible, but he does. And—' again Mary waited for the power of utterance, 'he orders me to come out with Mrs. Willis, in the *Valdivia*, and it sails on the 12th of December.'

'But Mary, Mary! you cannot be bound by this. It is only fair towards him, towards all of us, to give him time to answer our letters.'

Mary shook her head. 'The only condition, he says, on which he could allow me to remain, would be if I were engaged to James Frost.'

'Too late for that, certainly,' said Louis; and the smile was a relief to both. 'At any rate, it shows that he can spare you. Only give him time. When he has my father's explanation—and my father is certain to be so concerned at having cast any imputation on a lady. His first thought was to apologize—'

'That is not all. I remember now that dear mamma always said she did not know whether he would consent. Oh! how weak I was ever to listen—'

'No, Mary, that must not be said. It was my presumptuous, inveterate folly that prevented you from trusting my affection when she might have helped us.'

'I don't know. It would have caused her anxiety and distress when she was in no state for them. I don't think it did,' said Mary, considering; 'I don't think she ever knew how much I cared.'

The admission could only do Louis's heart good, and he recurred to his arguments that her father could be persuaded by such a letter as he felt it in him to write.

'You do not know all,' said Mary. 'I could not show you his letter; but, from it and from my aunt, I better understand what impressions he has of you all, and how hopeless it is.'

'Tell me!'

She could not help giving herself the relief, when that most loving, sympathizing face was pleading with her to let him comfort her. She knew there was no fiery nor rancorous temper to take unbrage, and it was best for him to know the completeness of the death-blow.

'Oh, Louis! he fancies that my dear mother's fondness for

her own family destroyed his domestic peace. He says their pride and narrow notions poisoned—yes, that is the word—poisoned her mind against him; and that was the reason he insisted on my being brought up here, and kept from you all.’

‘But I don’t understand why he let you come straight home to us, and live in Dynevor Terrace.’

‘Then he was really sorry mamma was so ill; and—and for all that was past; I am sure he felt it was the last parting, and only wished to do anything that could make up to her. He freely gave her leave to go wherever she pleased, and said not a word against Northwold. It was one of her great comforts that he never seemed in the least vexed at anything she had done since we went home. Besides, my aunt says that he and Mr. Dynevor had some plans about James and me.’

‘He will have that out of his head. He will come to reason. Fond of you, and sorry for the past, he will listen. No wonder he was in a passion; but just imagine what it would be to heed half Jem Frost says when he is well worked up!’

‘Papa is not like James,’ said Mary; ‘things go deeper with him. He never forgets! I shall never forgive myself for not having spoken to Robson! I know his manner, seeming to assent, and never committing himself, and I ought to have gone through anything rather than have taken such an accusation for granted.’

To hinder his pleading against her self-conviction, she reopened her letter to prove the cruelty of the injustice. Mr. Ponsonby professed to have been unwilling to enter so speedily on the new tie; but to have been compelled, by the species of persecution which was exercised on Rosita, in order to make her return to her nunnery. He dwelt on her timid affection and simplicity, and her exceeding mortification at the slur which Mary had been induced to cast upon her; though, he said, her innocent mind could not comprehend the full extent of the injury; since the step his daughter had taken would, when known, seriously affect the lady’s reception into society, in a manner only to be repaired by Mary’s immediately joining them at Lima. He peremptorily indicated the ship and the escort—a merchant’s wife, well known to her—and charged her, on her duty, as the only proof of obedience or affection which could remedy the past, to allow no influence nor consideration whatever to detain her. ‘You see,’ said Mary.

‘I see!’ was the answer. ‘Mary, you are right; you must go.’

The words restored her confiding look, and her face lost almost all the restless wretchedness which had so transformed it. ‘Thank you,’ she said, with a long breath; ‘I knew you would see it so.’

‘It will be a very pretty new style of wedding tour. Andes for Alps! No, Mary, you need not suspect me of trifling now! I really mean it; and, seriously, our going in that way would

set this Rosita straight with society much more handsomely and effectually. Don't doubt my father—I will fetch him.'

'Stop, Louis! You forget! Did I not tell you that he expressly warns me against you? He must have heard of what happened before: he says I had prudence once to withstand, and he trusts to my spirit and discretion to—' Mary stopped short of the phrase before her eyes—to resist the interested solicitations of necessitous nobility, and the allurements of a beggarly coronet. 'No,' she concluded; 'he says that you are the last person whom he could think of allowing me to accept.' She hid her face in her hands, and her voice died away.

'Happily that is done,' said Louis, not yet disconcerted; 'but if you go, as I own you must, it shall be with a letter of mine, explaining all. You will plead for me—I think you will; and when he is satisfied that we are no rebels, then the first ship that sails for Peru— Say that will do, Mary.'

'No, Louis, I know my father.' She roused herself, and sat upright, speaking resolutely, but not daring to look at him—'I made up my mind last night. It was weak and selfish in me to enter into this engagement, and it must be broken off. You must be left free—not bound for years and years.'

'Oh, Mary! Mary! this is too much. I deserved distrust by my wretched folly and fickleness last year, but I did not know what you were to me then—my most precious one! Can you not trust me? Do you not know how I would wait?'

'You would wait,' said poor Mary, striving with choking tears, 'and be sorry you had waited.'

'Are you talking madness, Mary? I should live for the moment to compensate for all.'

'You would waste your best years, and when the time came, you would still be young, and I grown into an old careworn woman. You would find you had waited for what was nothing worth!'

'How can you talk so,' cried Louis, wounded, 'when you know that to cherish and make up to you would be my dearest, fondest wish! No, don't shake your head! You *know* it is not a young rose and lily beauty that I love,—it is the honest, earnest glance in my Mary's eyes; the rest, and trust, and peace, whenever I do but come near her. Time can't take that away!'

'Pray,' said Mary, feebly, 'don't let us discuss it now. I know it is right. I was determined to say it to-day, that the worst might be over; but I can't argue, nor bear your kindness now. Please let it wait.'

'Yes, let it wait. It is depression. You will see it in a true light when you have recovered the shock, and don't fancy all must be given up together. Lie down and rest; I am sure you have been awake all night.'

'I may rest now I have told you, and seen you are not angry with poor papa, nor with me.' Oh! Louis—the gratitude to you, the weight off my mind!'

'I don't think any one could help taking the same view,' said Louis. 'It seems to me one of the cases where the immediate duty is the more clear because it is so very painful. Mary, I think that you are committing your way unto the Lord, and you know "He shall bring it to pass."'

As he spoke there was a tap at the door, and Miss Ponsonby, stiffly entering, said, 'Excuse my interruption, but I hope Lord Fitzjocelyn will be considerate enough not to harass you any longer with solicitations to act against your conscience.'

'He is not persuading me,' said Mary, turning towards her aunt a face which, through all her dejection, proved her peace in his support and approval; 'he is helping me.'

'Yes,' said Louis to the astonished aunt; 'since I have heard the true state of the case, I have been convinced that there is no choice for her but to go out, to repair the injustice so unfortunately done to this poor lady. It is a noble resolution, and I perfectly concur with her.'

'I am glad you think so properly, sir,' returned Miss Ponsonby. 'Lord Ormersfield seems quite of another opinion. He was desirous of seeing you, Mary; but I have been telling him I could permit no more interviews to-day.'

'Oh, no,' said Mary, putting her hand to her head, as if it could bear no more: 'not to-day! Louis, tell him how it is. Make him forgive me; but do not let me see him yet.'

'You shall see no one,' said Louis, tenderly; 'you shall rest. There—' and as if he had the sole right to her, he arranged the cushions, placed her on the sofa, and hung over her to chafe her hands, and bathe her forehead with *eau de Cologne*; while, as he detected signs of hasty preparations about the room, he added, 'Don't trouble yourself with your arrangements; I will see about all I can to help you. Only rest, and cure your head.'

'Say that one thing to me again,' whispered Mary, ere letting his hand go.

Again he murmured the words, 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He shall bring it to pass.'

Then Mary felt her hand pressed to his lips, but she would not unclothe her burning eyes; she would fain sleep beneath the impress of that spell of patient confidence.

The gentle authority of his manner had deprived Miss Ponsonby of all notion of interfering. This 'odious, frivolous young man of fashion' so entirely disconcerted her ideas of ardent lovers, or of self-interested puppies, that she gazed at him, surprised and softened; and when he looked at her anxiously, to judge whether Mary would find in her a kind comforter, her eyes were full of tears, and she said as they left the room, 'It must be a great relief to my poor Mary that you see it so sensibly. She has been suffering much in anticipation of this meeting.'

'Her unselfishness goes to one's heart!' said Louis, almost overcome. 'If she would but have spared herself yesterday!'

'Ah! she said she could not bear that you should be pained on your friend's wedding-day. I am much comforted to find that you appreciate the effort.'

This was not what Miss Ponsonby had intended to say, but there was something about the young man that touched her exceedingly; even when fresh from a very civil and decorous combat with his father, and a ripping-up of all the ancient grievances of the married life of their two relations, rendering wider than ever the breach between the houses of Ponsonby and Fitzjocelyn.

Lord Ormersfield came forward to learn whether he might see Mary, and was met by assurances that she must be kept as quiet as possible; upon which he took leave, making a stately bend of the head, while Louis shook Miss Ponsonby's hand, and said he should come to the door to inquire before the day was over.

'I never saw her so broken down,' he said, in answer to his father's compassionate but indignant exclamation as they walked home. 'Yesterday was a terrible strain on her.'

'I wish we had never brought her here,' said Lord Ormersfield. 'The aunt is your enemy, as she always was that of Mary's mother. She nearly avowed that she set her brother on making this premature prohibition.'

'I do not think she is unkind to Mary,' said Louis; 'I could be almost glad that the dear Aunt Kitty is spared all this worry. It would make her so very miserable.'

'Her influence would be in your favour, whereas this woman is perfectly unreasonable. She justifies her brother in everything, and is actually working on that poor girl's scruples of conscience to send her out by this ship.'

'Nay,' said Louis, 'after hearing her father's letter, I do not see that it is possible for her to do otherwise.'

Lord Ormersfield hastily turned to look at his son's countenance,—it was flushed and melancholy, but fully in earnest; nevertheless the Earl would not believe his ears, and made a sound as if he had missed the words.

'I am grieved enough to say so,' repeated Louis; 'but, as he puts it, I do not see how Mary can refuse to obey him.'

'I declare, Fitzjocelyn,' exclaimed his father, with some anger, 'any one who takes the trouble, may talk you into anything imaginable!'

'Not into believing her wrong.'

'I did not think you so weak!' continued his father. 'It is the very case where a woman's exaggerated notions of right may be wrought on to do her infinite harm! They become quite ridiculous without some one to show that such things may be carried too far! I must say, I did expect strength of mind and common sense for your own interest. I esteem it a mere matter of duty to put an end to such nonsense.'

'My dear father,' said Louis, 'it was Mary and her mother who first taught me my own obligations. I should never dare

to interfere with any one's filial duty—above all, where my own happiness is so deeply concerned.'

'Yours! I am not talking of yours. What is to become of Mary with such a man as that, and this Spanish woman, who, if she does not deserve all that has been said of her, no doubt soon will?—no education, no principles, breaking out of her convent! And you let yourself be drawn into calling it Mary's duty to run into such company as that! You are not fit to protect her.'

'From all I have heard of Mr. Ponsonby, I am convinced he has too much regard for his daughter to summon her into any improper society. I do not hear that he has been to blame as a father. I wish I could see it as you do; but not only do I know that Mary could not have an instant's peace under the sense of his displeasure, but it seems to me that this is one of the express commands which could not be disobeyed without setting aside the law of Heaven. If I gave my voice against it, I should fear to bring on us a curse, and not a blessing.'

'Fitzjocelyn, I always knew how it would be if you took to being one of those very good people. Nothing is so weak, and yet so unmanageable. Any rational being would look on it as a duty to rescue her from such a man as that; but that is too ordinary a virtue for you. You must go higher.'

Louis made no answer. Never had his father pained him so much, and he could ill brook additional suffering.

'However,' said the Earl, recovering, 'I shall see her. I shall put the matter in a just light. She is a sensible girl, and will understand me when she has recovered the shock. On one head I shall give warning. She must choose between us and her father. If she persist in going out to join this establishment, I will have your engagement given up.'

'Father! father! you would not be so cruel!'

'I know what I am saying. Am I to allow you to be encumbered all the time she is on the other side of the world, waiting Ponsonby's pleasure, to come home at last, in ten or fifteen years' time, worried and fretted to death, like her poor mother? No, Louis; it must be now or never.'

'You are only saying what I would not hear from her. She has been insisting on breaking off, and all my hope was in you.'

'She has? That is like her! The only reasonable thing I have heard yet.'

'Then you will not help me? You, who I thought loved her like your own daughter, and wished for nothing so much!'

'So I might; but that is a different thing from allowing you to wear out your life in a hopeless engagement. If she cast off her family, nothing could be better; otherwise, I would never connect you with them.'

It did not occur to his lordship that he was straining pretty hard the filial duty of his own son, while he was arguing that Mary should snap asunder the same towards her father.

The fresh discomfiture made poor Louis feel utterly dejected and almost hopeless ; but lest silence should seem to consent, he said, 'When you see Mary, you will be willing for me to do anything rather than lose what is so dear and so noble.'

'Yes, I will see Mary. We will settle it between us, and have it right yet ; but we must give her to-day to think it over, and get over the first shock. When she has had a little time for reflection, a few cool arguments from me will bring her to reason.'

So it was all to be settled over Louis's passive head ; and thus satisfied, his father, who was exceedingly sorry for him, forgot his anger, and offered to go home alone as Clara's escort, promising to return on the Monday, to bring the full force of his remonstrances to bear down Mary's scruples.

Lord Ormersfield believed Clara too much of a child to have any ideas on what was passing ; and had it depended on him, she must have gone home in an agony of ignorance on the cause of her cousin's trouble ; but Louis came with them to the station, and contrived to say to her while walking up and down the platform, 'Her father is bitter against me. He has sent for her, and she is going !'

Clara looked mutely in his face, with a sort of inquiring dismay.

'You'll hear all about it when my father has told Aunt Kitty,' said Louis. 'Clara,'—he paused, and spoke lower—'tell her I see what is right *now* ; tell her to—to pray for me, that I may not be talked into tampering with my conscience or with hers. Don't let it dwell on you or on my aunt,' he added, cheerfully. 'No, it won't ; you will be thinking of Jem and Isabel.' And as his father came up, his last words were, in his own bright tone, 'Tell granny from me that giraffes ought always to be seen by gaslight.'

Clara's countenance returned him a look of sorrowful reproach, for thinking her capable of being amused when he was in distress ; and she sat in silent musings all the way home—pondering over his words, speculating on his future, wondering what Mary felt, and becoming blunt and almost angry, when her grave escort in the opposite corner consulted civility by addressing some indifferent remark to her, as if, she said to herself, 'she were no better than a stuffed giraffe, and knew and cared nothing about anybody !'

He might have guessed that she understood something by the sudden way in which she curtailed her grandmother's rapturous and affectionate inquiries about the wedding, ran up-stairs on the plea of taking off her bonnet, and appeared no more till he had gone home ; when, coming down, she found granny, with tearful eyes, lamenting that Mr. Ponsonby was so harsh and unkind, and fully possessed with the rational view which her nephew had been impressing on her.

'Ha !' said Clara, 'that is what Louis meant. I'll tell you

what, granny, Lord Ormersfield never knew in his life what was right, half as well as Louis does. I wish he would let him alone. If Mary is good enough for him, she will go out and wait till her father comes round. If she is not, she won't; and Lord Ormersfield has no business to tease her.'

'Then you would like her to go out?' said Mrs. Frost.

'I like anything that makes Louis happy. I thought it would have been delightful to have him married—one could be so much more at Ormersfield, and Mary would be so nice; but as to their being over-persuaded, and thinking themselves half wrong! why, they would never be happy in their lives; and Louis would be always half-asleep or half-mad, to save himself the trouble of thinking. But he'll never do it!'

On the Saturday morning Mary's healthy and vigorous spirit had quite resumed its tone. The worst was over when she had inflicted the stroke on Louis, and seen him ready to support instead of adding to her distress. He found her pale and sorrowful, but calm, collected, and ready for exertion. By tacit consent, they avoided all discussion of the terms on which they were to stand. Greatly touched by her consideration for him on the wedding-day, he would not torture her with pleadings, and was only too grateful for every service that he was allowed to render her without protest, as still her chief and most natural dependence.

She did not scruple to allow him to assist her; she understood the gratification to him, and it was only too sweet to her to be still his object. She could trust him not to presume; his approval made her almost happy; and yet it was hard that his very patience and acquiescence should endear him so much as to render the parting so much the more painful. The day was spent in business. He facilitated much that would have been arduous for two solitary women, and did little all day but go about for Mary, fulfilling the commissions which her father had sent home; and though he did it with a sore heart, it was still a privilege to be at work for Mary.

Rigid as Miss Ponsonby was, she began to be touched. There was a doubt as to his admission when he came on Sunday morning—'Mistress saw no one on Sunday;' but when his name was carried in, Miss Ponsonby could not withstand Mary's face. She took care to tell him her rule; but that, considering the circumstances, she had made an exception in his favour, on the understanding that nothing was to break in upon the observance of the Sabbath.

Louis bent his head, with the heartfelt answer that he was but too glad to be permitted to go to church oncemore with Mary.

Aunt Melicent's Sunday was not quite their own Sunday, but all that they could desire was to be quietly together, and restricted from all those agitating topics and arrangements. It was a day of rest, and they valued it accordingly. In fact, Miss Ponsonby found the young lord so good and inoffensive,

that she broke her morning's resolution, invited him to partake of the cold dinner, let him go to church with them again in the evening, and remain to tea; and when he took leave, she expressed such surprised admiration at his having come and gone on his own feet, his church-going, and his conduct generally, that Mary could not help suspecting that her good aunt had supposed that he had never heard of the Fourth Commandment.

Miss Ponsonby was one of the many good women given to hard judgments on slight grounds, and to sudden reactions still more violent; and the sight of Lord Fitzjocelyn spending a quiet, respectable Sunday, had such an effect on her, that she transgressed her own mandate, and broached 'the distressing subject.'

'Mary, my dear, I suppose this young gentleman is an improved character?'

'He is always improving,' said Mary.

'I mean, that an important change must have taken place since I understood you to say you had refused him. I thought you acted most properly then; and, as I see him now, I think you equally right in accepting him.'

'He was very much what he is now,' said Mary.

'Then it was from no doubt of his being a serious character?'

'None whatever,' said Mary, emphatically.

'Well, my dear, I must confess his appearance, his family, and your refusal, misled me. I fear I did him great injustice.'

A silence, and then Miss Ponsonby said, 'After all, my dear, though I thought quite otherwise at first, I do believe that, considering what the youth is, and how much attached he seems, you might safely continue the engagement.'

Mary's heart glowed to her aunt for having been thus conquered by Louis—she who, three nights back, had been so severely incredulous, so deeply disappointed in her niece for having been deluded into endurance of him. But her resolution was fixed. 'It would not be right,' she said; 'his father would not allow it. There is so little chance of papa's relenting, or of my coming home, that it would be wrong to keep him in suspense. He had better turn his thoughts elsewhere while he is young enough to begin again.'

'It might save him from marrying some mere fine lady.'

'That will never be; whatever woman he chooses will—' She could not go on, but presently cleared her voice—'No; I should like to leave him quite free. I was less his choice than his father's; and, though I thought we should have been very happy, it does not seem to be the leading of Heaven. I am so far his inferior in cleverness, and everything attractive, and have been made so like his elder sister, that it might not have been best for him. I want him to feel that, in beginning afresh, he is doing me no injury; and then in time, whenever I come home, it may be such a friendship as there was between our elders. That is what I try to look forward to,—no, I don't

think I look forward to anything. Good night, Aunt Melicent—I am so glad you like him!’

In this mind Mary met Lord Ormersfield. The delay had been an advantage, for he was less irritated, and she had regained self-possession. Her passage had been taken, and this was an argument that told on the Earl, though he refused to call it irrevocable. He found that there was no staggering her on the score of the life that awaited her; she knew more on that subject than he did, had confidence in her father, and no dread of Rosita; and she was too much ashamed and grieved at the former effect of his persuasions to attend to any more of a like description. He found her sense of duty more stubborn than he had anticipated, and soon had no more to say. She might carry it too far; but the principle was sound, and a father could not well controvert it. He had designed the rupture with Louis as a penalty to drive her into his measures; but he could not so propound it, and was wondering how to bring it in, when Mary relieved him by beginning herself, and stating the grounds with such sensible, unselfish, almost motherly care of Louis’s happiness, that he was more unwilling than ever to let him resign her, and was on the point of begging her to reconsider, and let Louis wait for ever rather than lose her. But he knew they ought not to be bound, under such uncertainties, and his conviction was too strong to give way to emotion. He thanked her, and praised her with unwonted agitation, and regretted more than ever; and so they closed the conference by deciding that, unless Mr. Ponsonby should be induced to relent by his daughter’s representations on her arrival, Mary and Louis must consider themselves as mutually released.

That loophole—*forlorn, most forlorn hope*, as they knew it to be—was an infinite solace to the young people, by sparing them a formal parting, and permitting them still to feel that they belonged to each other. If he began declaring that nothing would ever make him feel disconnected with Mary, he was told that it was not time to think of that, and they must not waste their time. And once Mary reminded him how much worse it would be if they had been separated by a quarrel. ‘*Anger might give one spirits,*’ he said, smiling mournfully.

‘At the time; but think what it would be not to be able to remember happy times without remorse.’

‘Then you do mean to recollect, Mary?’

‘I trust to bring myself to remember rightly and wisely. I shall try to set it for a reward for myself to cure me of *repinings*,’ said Mary, looking into his face, as if the remembrance of it must bring cheerfulness and refreshment.

‘And when shall I not think, Mary? When I leave off work I shall want you for a companion; when I go to work, the thought must stir me up. Your judgment must try my own.’

‘Oh, hush, Louis! this is not good. Be yourself, and be more

than yourself, and only think of the past as a time when we had a great deal of pleasantness, and you did me much good.'

'Did I?'

'Yes; I see it now I am with Aunt Melicent. You put so many more thoughts in my head, and showed me that so much more was good and wholesome than I used to fancy. Dear mamma once said you were educating me; and I hope to go on, and not let your lessons waste away.'

'Nay, Mary, you won good everywhere. If you had not been Mary, I might have made you a great goose. But you taught me all the perseverance I ever had. And, oh! Mary, I don't wonder you do not trust it.'

'There is the forbidden subject,' said Mary, firmly.

That was the sort of conversation into which they fell now and then during those last days of busy sadness.

Truly it could have been worse. Suffering by their own fault would have rent them asunder more harshly, and Louis's freedom from all fierceness and violence softened all ineffably to Mary. James Frost's letter of fiery indignation, almost of denunciation, made her thankful that he was not the party concerned; and Louis made her smile at Isabel's copy of all his sentiments in ladylike phrases.

The last day came. Louis would not be denied seeing Mary on board the *Valdivia*; and, in spite of all Miss Ponsonby's horror of railways, he persuaded her to trust herself under his care to Liverpool. She augured great things from the letter which she had intrusted to Mary, and in which she had spoken of Lord Fitzjocelyn in the highest terms her vocabulary could furnish.

They parted bravely. Spectators hindered all display of feeling, and no one cried, except Miss Ponsonby.

'Good-bye, Louis; I will not forget your messages to Tom Madison. My love to your father and Aunt Catharine.'

'Good-bye, Mary; I shall see Tom and Chimborazo yet.'

CHAPTER XXVII

THE NEW WORLD

Still onward, as to southern skies
We spread our sails, new stars arise,
New lights upon the glancing tide,
Fresh hues where pearl and coral hide:
What are they all but tokens true
Of grace for ever fresh and new!—*Prayers for Emigrants*

THERE are some days in the early year, devoid indeed of spring brilliance, but full of soft, heavy, steaming fragrance, pervading the gray air with sweet odours, and fostering the growth of tender bud and fragile stem with an unseen influence, more mild and kindly than even the smiling sunbeam or the

gushing shower. 'A growing day,' as the country people term such genial, gentle weather, might not be without analogy to the brief betrothal of Louis and Mary.

Subdued and anxious, there had been little of the ordinary light of joy, hope or gaiety, and their pleasures had been less their own than in preparing the happiness of their two friends. It was a time such as to be more sweet in memory than it was in the present; and the shade which had hung over it, the self-restraint and the forbearance which it had elicited, had unconsciously conduced to the development of the characters of both, preparing them to endure the parting far more effectually than unmixed enjoyment could have done. The check upon Louis's love of trifling, the restraint on his spirits, the being thrown back on his own judgment when he wanted to lean upon Mary, had given him a habit of controlling his boyish ways. It was a call to train himself in manliness and self-reliance. It changed him from the unstable reed he once had been, and helped him to take one steady and consistent view of the trial required of him and of Mary, and then to act upon it resolutely and submissively.

With Mary gone, he cared little what became of him until her letters could arrive; and his father, with more attention to his supposed benefit than to his wishes, carried him at once, without returning home, to a round of visits among all his acquaintance most likely to furnish a distracting amount of Christmas gaieties. In the midst of these, there occurred a vacancy in the representation of a borough chiefly under the influence of Sir Miles Oakstead; and, as it was considered expedient that he should be brought into Parliament, his father repaired with him at once to Oakstead, and involved him in all the business of the election. On his success, he went with his father to London for the session, and this was all that his friends at Northwold knew of him. He wrote hurried notes to James or to Mr. Holdsworth on necessary affairs connected with his farm and improvements, mentioning facts instead of feelings, and promising to write to Aunt Catharine when he should have time; but the time did not seem to come, and it was easy to believe that his passiveness of will, increased by the recent stroke, had caused him to be hurried into a condition of involuntary practical activity.

Mary, meanwhile, was retracing her voyage, in the lull of spirits which, after long straining, had nothing to do but to wait in patience, bracing themselves for a fresh trial. Never suffering herself, at sea, her first feelings, after the final wrench of parting, were interrupted by the necessity of attending to her friend, a young mother, with children enough to require all the services that the indefatigable Mary could perform. If Mrs. Willis always averred that she never could have gone through the voyage without Miss Ponsonby, Mary felt, in return, that the little fretful boy and girl, who would never let

her sit and think, except when both were asleep, had been no small blessing to her.

Yet Mary was not so much absorbed and satisfied with the visible and practical as had once been the case. The growth had not been all on Louis's side. If her steadfast spirit had strengthened his wavering resolution, the intercourse and sympathy with him had opened and unfolded many a perception and quality in her, which had been as tightly and hardly cased up as leaf-buds in their gummy envelopes. A wider range had been given to her thoughts; there was a swelling of heart, a vividness of sensation, such as she had not known in earlier times; she had been taught the mystery of creation, the strange connection with the Unseen, and even with her fellow-men. Beyond the ordinary practical kind offices, for which she had been always ready, there was now mingled something of Louis's more comprehensive spirit of questioning what would do them good, and drawing food for reflection from their diverse ways.

She was sensible of the change again and again, when sights recurred which once had only spoken to her eye. That luminous sea, sparkling like floods of stars, had been little more than 'How pretty! how funny!' at her first voyage. Now, it was not only 'How Louis would admire it!' but 'How profusely, how gloriously has the Creator spread the globe with mysterious beauty! how marvellously has He caused His creatures to hold forth this light, to attract others to their needful food!' And the furrow of fire left by their vessel's wake spoke to her of that path 'like a shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day.' If with it came the remembrance of his vision of the threads of light, it was not a recollection which would lead to repining.

At Cape Horn, a mighty ice mountain drifted within view, spired, pinnacled, encrusted with whiteness, rivalled only by the glory of the summer cloud, caverned here and there into hollows of sapphire blue, too deeply dazzling to behold, or rising into peaks of clear, hard, chill green; the wild fantastic points sometimes glimmering with fragments of the rainbow arch; the rich variety, endless beyond measure in form and colouring, and not only magnificent and terrible in the whole mass, but lovely beyond imagination in each crystal too minute for the eye. Mary had once, on a like occasion, only said, 'it was very cold;' and looked to see whether the captain expected the monster to bear down on the ship. But the present iceberg put her in mind of the sublime aspirations which Gothic cathedrals seem as if they would fain embody. And then, she thought of the marvellous interminable waste of beauty of those untrodden regions, whence yonder enormous iceberg was but a small fragment—a petty messenger—regions unseen by human eye—beauty untouched by human hand—the glory, the sameness, yet the infinite variety of perfect purity. Did it not seem,

with all the associations of cold, of peril, of dreariness, to be a visible token that indeed He who fashioned it can prepare 'good things past man's understanding'?

It was well for Mary that southern constellations, snowy, white-winged albatross, leaping flying-fish, and white-capped mountain-coast had been joined in her mind with something higher, deeper, and less personal, or their recurrence would have brought her nothing but pain unmitigated in the contrast with the time when first she had beheld them six years ago.

Then she had been full of hope and eager ardour to arrive, longing for the parental presence of which she had so long been deprived, hailing every novel scene as a proof that she was nearer home, and without the anticipation of one cloud, only expecting to be loved, to love and to be useful. And now all fond illusions as to her father had been snatched away, her very love for him rendering the perception doubly cruel; her mother, her precious mother, far away in Ormersfield churchyard—her life probably shortened by his harshness—her place occupied by a young girl, differing in language, in Church, in everything—Mary's own pardon uncertain, after all her sacrifices. A sense of having deeply offended, hung upon her; and her heart was so entirely in England, that had her home been perfect, her voyage must still have been a cruel effort. That one anticipation of being set at rest by her father's forgiveness, and the forlorn despairing hope of his relenting towards Louis, were all she dared to dwell on; and when Mrs. Willis counted the days till she could arrive and meet her husband, poor Mary felt as if, but for these two chances of comfort, she could gladly have prolonged the voyage for the rest of her life.

But one burning tropical noon, the *Valdivia* was entering Callao harbour, and Mary, sick and faint at heart, was arraying herself in a coloured dress, lest her mourning should seem to upbraid her father. The voyage was over, the ship was anchored, boats were coming off shore, the luggage was being hoisted out of the hold, the passengers were congregated on deck, eager to land, some gazing with curious and enterprising eyes on the new country, others scanning every boat in hopes of meeting a familiar face. Mrs. Willis stood trembling with hope, excitement, and the strange dread often rushing in upon the last moment of expectation. She clung to Mary for support, and once said—
'Oh, Miss Ponsonby, how composed you are!'

Mary's feelings were too deep—too much concentrated for trembling. She calmed and soothed the wife's sudden fright, lest 'something should have happened to George;' and she even smiled when the children's scream of ecstasy infected their mother, when the papa and uncle they had been watching for with straining eyes proved to be standing on deck close beside them.

Mary cast her eyes round, and saw nothing of her own. She stood apart, while the Willis family were in all the rapture of

the meeting ; she saw them moving off, too happy and sufficient for themselves even to remember her. She had a dull, heavy sensation that she must bear all, and that this was the beginning ; and she was about to begin her arrangements for her dreary landing, when Mrs. Willis's brother, Mr. Ward, turned back. He was a middle-aged merchant, whom her mother had much liked and esteemed, and there was something cheering in his frank, hearty greeting, and satisfaction in seeing her. It was more like a welcome, and it brought the Willises back, shocked at having forgotten her in the selfishness of their own joy ; but they had made sure that she had been met. Mr. Ward did not think that she was expected by the *Valdivia* ; Mr. Ponsonby had not mentioned it as likely. So they were all seated in the boat, with the black rowers ; and while the Willises fondled their children, and exchanged home-news, Mr. Ward sat by Mary, and spoke to her kindly, not openly referring to the state of her home, but showing a warmth and consideration which evinced much delicate sympathy.

They all drove together in the Willises' carriage up the sloping road from Callao to Lima, and Mary heard astonishment, such as she had once felt, breaking out in screams from the children at the sight of omnibuses filled with gaily-dressed negroes, and brown horsewomen in Panama hats and lace-edged trousers careering down the road. But then, her father had come and fetched her from on board, and that dear mamma was waiting in the carriage !

They entered the old walled town when twilight had already closed in, and Mrs. Willis was anxious to take her tired little ones home at once. They were set down at their own door ; but Mr. Ward, with protecting anxious kindness, insisted on seeing Miss Ponsonby safely home before he would join them. As they drove through the dark streets, Mary heard a little restless movement, betraying some embarrassment ; and at last, with an evident desire of reassuring her, he said, 'Señora Ponsonby is thought very pleasing and engaging ;' and then, as if willing to change the subject, he hastily added, 'I suppose you did not speak the *Pizarro* ?'

'No.'

'She has sailed about three weeks. She takes home your cousin, Mr. Dynevor.'

Mary cried out with surprise.

'I thought him a complete fixture, but he is gone home for a year. It seems his family property was in the market, and he was anxious to secure it.'

'How glad his mother will be !' was all Mary could say, as there rushed over her the thought of the wonderful changes that would make in Dynevor Terrace. Her first feeling was that she must tell Louis ; her second, that two oceans were between them ; and then she thought of Aunt Catharine having lived, after all, to see her son.

She had forgotten to expect the turn when the carriage wheeled under the arched entry of her father's house. All was gloom and stillness, except where a little light shone in a sort of porter's lodge upon the eager negro features of two blacks, with much gesticulation, playing at dice. They came out hastily at the sound of the carriage; and as Mr. Ward handed out Mary, and inquired for Mr. Ponsonby, she recognized and addressed the white-woolled old Xavier, the mayor domo. Poor old Xavier! Often had she hunted and teased him, and tried to make him understand '*cosas de Inglaterra*,' and to make him cease from his beloved dice; but no sooner did he see her face than, with a cry of joy, '*La Señorita Maria! la Señorita Maria!*' down he went upon his knees, and began kissing the hem of her dress.

All the rest of the negro establishment came round, capering and chattering Spanish; and, in the confusion, Mary could not get her question heard—Where was her father? and Xavier's vehement threats and commands to the others to be silent, did not produce a calm. At last, bearing a light, there came forward a faded, sallow dame, with a candle in her hand, who might have sat for the picture of the Dueña Rodriguez, and at her appearance the negroes subsided. She was an addition to the establishment since Mary's departure; but in her might be easily recognized the Tía, the individual who in Limenian households holds a position between companion and housekeeper. She introduced herself by the lugubrious appellation of Señora Dolores, and, receiving Mary with obsequious courtesy, explained that the Señor and Señora were at a *tertulia*, or evening party. She lighted Mary and Mr. Ward into the *quadra*; and there Mr. Ward, shaking hands with her as if he would thereby compensate for all that was wanting in her welcome, promised to go and inform her father of her arrival.

Mary stood in the large dark room, with the soft matted floor, and the windows high up near the carved timbered ceiling, the single lamp, burning in rum, casting a dim gleam over the well-known furniture, by which her mother had striven to give an English appearance to the room. It was very dreary, and she would have given the world to be alone with her throbbing head, her dull heartache, and the weariness of spirits over-long wound up for the meeting; but her own apartment could be no refuge until it had been cleansed and made ready, and Dolores and Xavier were persecuting her every moment with their hospitality and their inquiries. Then came a quick, manly tread, and for a moment her heart almost seemed to stand still, in the belief that it was her father; but it was only Robson, hurrying in to offer his services and apologies. Perhaps he was the very last person she could bear to see, feeling, as she did, that if he had been more explicit, all the offence would have been spared. He was so much aware of all family matters, and was accustomed to so much confidence from her father, that she could not believe

him unconscious ; and there was something hateful to her in the plausible frankness and deferential familiarity of his manners, as, brushing up his sandy hair upon his forehead, he poured forth explanations that Mr. Ponsonby would be delighted, but grieved that no one had met her—*Valdivia* not expected so soon—not anticipated the pleasure—if they had imagined that Miss Ponsonby was a passenger—

‘My father desired that I would come out by her,’ said Mary.

‘Ay, true—so he informed me ; but since later intelligence’—and he cast a glance at Mary, to judge how much further to go ; but meeting with nothing but severity, he covered the impertinence by saying, ‘In fact, though the *Valdivia* was mentioned, and Mrs. Willis, Mr. Ponsonby had reason to suppose you would not receive his letters in time to avail yourself of the escort.’

‘I did so, however,’ said Mary, coldly.

‘Most gratifying. Mr. and Mrs. Ponsonby will be highly gratified. In fact, Miss Ponsonby, I must confess that was a most unfortunate blunder of mine last August. I should not have fallen into the error had I not been so long absent at Guayaquil that I had had no opportunity of judging of the amiable lady ; and I will own to much natural surprise and some indignation, before I had had the pleasure of personal acquaintance with the charms and the graces— Hem ! In effect, it was a step that no one could have recommended ; and when your noble relative put it to me in so many words whether I would counsel your continuing your journey, I could not take it on me to urge a measure so painful to your feelings, unaware as I was then of the amiable qualities of the lady who occupies the situation of the highly beloved and esteemed—’

Mary could not bear to hear her mother’s name in his mouth, so she cut him short by saying, ‘I suppose you thought you acted for the best, Mr. Robson ; it was very unfortunate, but it cannot be helped. Pray can you tell me where the lad Madison is ?’ she added, resolved to show him that she would not discuss these matters with him ; ‘I have a parcel for him.’

‘He is at the San Benito mine, Miss Ponsonby.’

‘How does he go on ?’

‘Well—I may say very well, allowing for inexperience. He appears a steady, intelligent lad, and I have no doubt will answer the purpose well.’

There was one gratification for Mary, at least, in the pleasure this would afford at home ; but Robson continued making conversation about Mr. Dynevor’s visit to England, and the quantity of work this temporary absence entailed on him ; and then on the surprise it would be to his patron to find her, and Doña Rosa’s interest in her, and the numerous gaieties of the bride, and the admiration she excited, and his own desire to be useful. This afforded Mary an opportunity for getting rid of him at last, by sending him to make arrangements for her baggage to be sent from Callao the next morning.

Ten minutes more, half spent in conquering her disgust, half in sick anticipation, and other feet were crossing the matted *sala*, the curtain over the doorway was drawn aside, and there stood her father, and a lady, all white and diamonds, by his side. He held out his arms, Mary fell into them, and it was the same kind rough kiss which had greeted her six years back. It seemed to be forgiveness, consolation, strength, all at once; and their words mingled—'Papa, you forgive me'—'Mary, my good girl, I did not think they would have let you come back to me. This was but a dreary coming home for you, my dear.' And then, instantly changing his language to Spanish, he added, appealing to his wife, that had they guessed she was on board, they would have come to meet her.

Rosita replied earnestly to that effect, and warmly embraced Mary, pitying her for such an arrival, and hoping that Dolores had made her comfortable. The rest of the conversation was carried on in the same tongue. Rosita was much what Mary had expected—of a beautiful figure, with fine eyes, and splendid raven hair, but without much feature or expression. She looked almost like a dream to-night, however, with her snowy robes, and the diamonds sparkling with their dew-drop flashes in her hair and on her arms, with the fitful light caught from the insufficient candles. All she ventured to say had a timid gracefulness and simplicity that were very winning; and her husband glanced more than once to see if she were not gaining upon his daughter; and so in truth she was, personally, though it was exceedingly painful to see her where Mary had been used to see that dear suffering face; and it was impossible not to feel the contrast with her father as painfully incongruous. Mr. Ponsonby was a large man, with the jovial manner of one never accustomed to self-restraint; good birth and breeding making him still a gentleman, in spite of his loud voice and the traces of self-indulgence. He was ruddy and bronzed, and his eyebrows and hair looked as if touched by hoar frost; altogether as dissimilar a partner as could be devised for the slender girlish being by his side.

After a little Spanish conversation, all kind on his side, and thus infinitely relieving Mary, they parted for the night. She laid before him the packet of letters, which she had held all this time as the last link to Louis, and sought his eye as she did so with a look of appeal; but he carefully averted his glance, and she could read nothing.

Weary as she was, Mary heard again and again, through her unglazed windows, the watchman's musical cry of '*Ave Maria purissima, las—es temblado! Viva Peru y sereno!*' and chid herself for foolish anticipations that Louis would hear and admire all the strange sounds of the New World. The kindness of her welcome gave her a little hope; and she went over and over again her own part of the discussion which she expected, almost

persuading herself that Louis's own conduct and her aunt's testimony must win the day.

She need not have spent so many hours in preparation for the morning. She was up early, in hopes of seeing her father before he went to his office ; but he was gone for a ride. The English breakfast, which had been established, much to his content, by her own exertions, had quite vanished ; each of the family had a cup of chocolate in private, and there was no meeting till, late in the morning, Rosita sauntered into her room, embraced her, made inquiries as to her rest, informed her that she was going to the Opera that night, and begged her to accompany her. To appear in public with Rosita was the tribute for which Mary had come out, so she readily agreed ; and thereupon the Señora digressed into the subject of dress, and required of Mary a display of all her robes, and an account of the newest fashions of the English ladies. It was all with such innocent, earnest pleasure, that Mary could not be annoyed, and good-naturedly made all her disappointing display.

The midday meal brought her father—still kind and affectionate, but never dropping the Spanish, nor manifesting any consciousness of her letters. She had hopes of the period allotted to the siesta, to which custom, in old days, she had never acceded, but had always spent the interval on any special occupation—above all, to writing for him ; but he went off without any notice of her, and she was in no condition to dispense with the repose, for her frame was tired out, though her hopes and fears could not even let her dreams rest.

Then came a drive with Rosita, resplendent in French millinery ; then supper ; then the Opera, to which her father accompanied them, still without a word. Another day was nearly the same, only that this time she had to do her best to explain the newest fashions in behalf of a dress of Rosita's, then being made, and in the evening to go to a party at the Consul's, where she met Mr. Ward, and had some talk which she might have enjoyed but for her suspense.

On the third, Rosita was made happy by unpacking an elegant little black *papier maché* table, a present from Miss Ponsonby. Good Melicent ! were ever two sisters-in-law more unlike ? But Lord Ormersfield had done Rosita and her husband good service. If Aunt Melicent had first learned the real facts, her wrath would have been extreme—a mere child, a foreigner, a Roman Catholic, a nun ! Her horror would have known no bounds, and she would, perhaps, have broken with her brother for ever. But by making the newly-married pair victims of injustice, the Earl had made the reality a relief, and Melicent had written civilly to her brother, and a sisterly sort of stiff letter to the bride—of which the Limenian could not understand one word ; so that Mary had to render it all into Spanish, even to her good aunt's hopes that Rosita would be kind to her, and use all her influence in favour of her happiness.

Whether Rosita would have comprehended this without Mary's blushes might be questioned, but she did say, 'Ah! yes! you were to have married the Visconde, were you not? El Señor was so angry! Did his father forbid when your father refused your portion?'

'Oh, no; he would receive me if I brought nothing.'

'And you wish to marry?' said Rosita.

'If my father would only consent.'

'But why did you come here, then?' said Rosita, opening her large eyes.

'My father commanded me.'

'England is a long way off,' said Rosita, languidly; 'he could not have reached you there. You would have been a great lady and noble! How could you come away, if he would still have you?'

'Because it would have been wrong. We could not have been happy in disobeying my father.'

'Ah! but you could have done penance. I had many penances to do for quitting my convent; Padre Iñigo was very severe; but they are over at last, and I am free for giving alms twice a week, and the Sisters have forgiven me, and send me so many silver flowers and *dulces*; I will show them to you some day. Could you not have done penance?'

'I am afraid not.'

'Ah! I forgot you were a heretic, poor thing! How inconvenient! And so you will not come with me to the bull-fight next Sunday?'

Such being Rosita's ideas on the point, Mary gave up much hope in her influence, and tried what a good-humoured announcement of her re-establishment of the English breakfast would effect towards bringing her father to a *tête-à-tête*, but he never came near it. The waiting in silence was miserable enough for herself, but she would have continued to bear it except for the injustice to Louis, who must not be kept in suspense. The departure of the next English mail should be the limit of her endurance; and after a day of watching, she finally went up to her father when he would have bidden her good night, and said, in English, 'Papa, if you please, I must speak to you.'

'So you shall, my dear, but we are all tired; we must have our night's rest.'

'No, papa, it must be to-night, if you please. It is necessary for me to know before to-morrow how I am to write to Lord Fitzjocelyn.'

'Pshaw! Mary, I've settled that young fellow!'

'Papa, I don't think you know—'

'I've written him a civil answer, if that's what you mean, much civiler than he or his father deserve,' he said, speaking loud, and trying to fling away from her; but she stood her ground, and spoke calmly and steadily, though her heart beat violently.

'You do not understand the true state of the case, papa; and without doing so, you cannot write such an answer as they deserve.'

'I know this, that old Ormersfield has been the curse of my life!' and out poured one of those torrents of fierce passion which had been slowly but surely the death of his wife. Mary had never heard one in the full tide before, but she stood firm; there were none of the tears such as, in her mother, had been wont to exasperate him further, but with pale cheeks, compressed lips, and hands locked together, her heart was one silent entreaty that it might be forgiven him above. Thus she stood while the storm of anger raged, and when at last it had exhausted itself, he said, in a lower voice, 'And so you are still taken with this fellow's son, this young puppy! I thought you had more spirit and sense, Mary, or I never would have trusted you among them.'

'There are very few people in this world half so good or so right-minded as Fitzjocelyn,' said Mary, earnestly and deliberately. 'It was he who bade me come to you, well knowing that we could never be happy without your consent.'

'Oh! he did so, did he? He is deeper than I thought; would not risk your fortune. Why, Mary, I did not think a girl of your sense could be so taken in! It is transparent, I tell you. They get you there, flatter you up with their attentions, but when they find you too wise for them the first time, off goes this youth to Miss Conway, finds her a bad speculation, no heiress at all, and disposes of her to his cousin. I wonder if he'll find old Dynevor grateful. Meanwhile the old lord must needs come out here, finds our gains a better prize than he expected, trumps up this story at Valparaiso, takes you in, and brings you home to this precious youth. And you, and your aunt too, are ready to believe it all! I always knew that women were fools whenever a title came in their way; I see it more than ever now, since you and Melicent are both like the rest of 'em.'

'Papa,' said Mary, again rallying her firmness, 'we have found sadly how easy it is to be deceived when one is not on the spot. Will you listen to me, who saw it all?'

'No, Mary, I will not hear the nonsense they have put into your head, my poor girl. No! I tell you it is of no use! It is my resolute purpose that not one farthing of mine shall go to patch up the broken-down Ormersfield property! The man is my enemy, and has sown dissension in my family from the first moment I connected myself with him. I'll never see my daughter his son's wife. I wonder he had the impudence to propose it! I shall think you lost to all feeling for your father, if you say another word about it.'

'Very well,' said Mary, with steady submission. 'Then I will only write one more letter to Fitzjocelyn, and tell him that your objections are insuperable, and that he must think of it no more.'

'That's right, Mary! you are a good girl, after all! You'll stand by your father, in spite of all the House of Peers! I'm glad to see you hold up your head so bravely. So you did fancy being a Viscountess, did you? but it is not a heart-breaking matter either, my girl!'

This was too much for Mary, and when her father would have kissed her, she laid her head on his shoulder and wept silently but bitterly.

'Ha! what's all this? Why, you don't pretend to care for a young mercenary scamp like that?'

'He is the noblest, most generous, most disinterested man I ever knew!' said Mary, standing apart, and speaking clearly. 'I give him up because you command me, father, but I will not hear him spoken of unjustly.'

'Ha! ha! so long as you give him up, we won't quarrel. He shall be all that, and more too, if you like; and we'll never fight over the matter again, since I have you safe back, my child.'

'I do not mean to mention him again,' said Mary; 'I wish to obey you.'

'Then there's an end of the matter. You'll get over it, my girl, and we'll find some honest man worth two of your nig-gardly, proud-spirited earls. There, I know you are a reasonable girl that can be silent, and not go on teasing. So, Mary, you may have a cup of tea for me to-morrow in the *sala*, like old times. Good night, my dear.'

Waiting upon himself! That was the reward that Mr. Ponsonby held out to his daughter for crushing her first love.

But it was a reward. Anything that drew her father nearer to her was received with gratitude by Mary, and the words of kindness in some degree softened the blow. She had never had much hope, though now she found it had been more than she had been willing to believe; and even now she could not absolutely cease to entertain some hopes of the results of Oliver's return, nor silence one lingering fancy that Louis might yet wait unbound; although she told herself of his vacillation between herself and Isabel, of his father's influence, and of the certainty that he would see many more worthy of his love than herself. Not any one who could love him so well—oh, no! But when Mary found her thoughts taking this turn, she rose up as she lay, clasped her hands together, and repeated half aloud again and again, 'Be Thou my all!'

And by the morning, though Mary's cheek was very white, and her eyes sunken for want of sleep, she had a cheerful word for her father, and a smile, the very sight of which would have gone to the heart of any one of those from whom he had cut her off.

Then she wrote her letters. It was not so hard to make this final severance as it had been to watch Louis's face, and think of the pain she had to inflict. Many a time had she weighed

each phrase she set down, so that it might offend neither against sincerity nor resignation, and yet be soothing and consoling. Some would have thought her letter stiff and laboured, but she had learned to believe that a grave and careful style befitted a serious occasion, and would have thought incoherency childish or affected.

She released him entirely from his engagement, entreating him not to rebel against the decision, but to join her in thankfulness that no shade need be cast over the remembrance of the happy hours spent together ; and begging him not to grieve, since she had, after the first pain, been able to acquiesce in the belief that the separation might conduce to his happiness ; and she should always regard him as one of those most near and dear to her, and rejoice in whatever was for his welfare, glad that his heart was still young enough to form new ties. 'Forgive me for speaking thus,' she added ; 'I know that it may wound you now, but there may come a time when it may make you feel more at ease and unfettered ; and I could not endure to imagine that the affection which you brought yourself to lavish on one so unworthy, should stand in the way of your happiness for life.' She desired him to make no answer, but to consider this as the final dissolution ; and she concluded by all that she thought would prove most consoling, as to the present state of affairs with her ; and with a few affectionate words, to show that he was still a great deal to her, though everything he might not be.

This done, Mary faced her life in the New World. She had to form her habits for herself, for her importance in the house was gone ; but she went to work resolutely, and, lonely as she was, she had far more resources than if she had never been at Ormersfield. She had many hours to herself, and she unpacked her books, and set herself courses of study, to which Louis had opened the door. She unveiled her eyes to natural history, and did not find flower or butterfly unsoothing. She undertook the not very hopeful task of teaching a tiny negro imp, who answered the purpose of a bell, to read and work ; and she was persevering in her efforts to get Xavier and Dolores to make her father comfortable.

Her father was decidedly glad of her company. He liked conversation, and enjoyed the morning meeting, to which Mr. Ward was often a welcome addition, delighting in anything so English, and finding Miss Ponsonby much improved by her introduction to English society. Sometimes Mary wrote for her father, and now and then was consulted ; and she was always grateful for whatever made her feel herself of use. She was on kind and friendly terms with Rosita, but they did not become more intimate than at first. The Señora was swinging in a hammock half-asleep, with a cigarette between her lips, all the morning ; and when she emerged from this torpid state, in a splendid toilette, she had too many more congenial friends often

to need her step-daughter in her visits, her expeditions to lotteries, and her calls on her old friends the nuns. On a fast-day, or any other occasion that kept her at home, she either arranged her jewels, discussed her dresses, or had some lively chatter, which she called learning English. She coaxed, fondled, and domineered prettily over Mr. Ponsonby; and he looked on amused, gratified her caprices, caressed her, and seemed to regard her as a pretty pet and plaything.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TWO PENDRAGONS

The red dragon and the white,
Hard together gan they smite,
With mouth, paw, and tail,
Between hem was full hard batail.—*The History of Merlin*

SPRING was on the borders of summer, when one afternoon, as Clara sat writing a note in the drawing-room, she heard a tap at the door of the little sitting-room, and springing to open it, she beheld a welcome sight.

‘Louis! How glad I am! Where do you come from?’

‘Last from the station,’ said Louis.

‘What makes you knock at that door, now the drawing-room is alive?’

‘I could not venture on an unceremonious invasion of Mrs. James Frost’s territory.’

‘You’ll find no distinction of territory here,’ laughed Clara. ‘It was a fiction that we were to live in separate rooms, like naughty children. Does not the drawing-room look nice?’

‘As much improved as the inhabitant. Where are the other natives?’

‘Granny and Isabel are walking, and will end by picking up Jem coming out of school. We used to wait for him so often, that at last he said we should be laughed at; so there’s a law against it which no one dares to transgress but granny.’

‘So I conclude that you are a happy family.’

‘After all, it was worth spending two years at school to enjoy properly the having it over.’

‘I give Jem credit for having secured a first-rate governess for you.’

‘That she is! Why, with her I really do like reading and drawing all the morning! I almost believe that some day I shall wake up and find myself an accomplished young lady! And, Louis, have you read the last *Western Magazine*?’

‘I have read very little for sport lately.’

‘Then I must tell you. Jem was bemoaning himself about having nothing to give to the new Blind Asylum; and the next evening Isabel brought out the prettiest little manuscript

book, tied with blue ribbon, and told him to do as he pleased with it. It was a charming account of her expedition to the Hebrides, written out for her sisters, without a notion of anything further; but Jem sent it to this Magazine, and it is accepted, and the first part is out. She will have quite a sum for it, and all is to go to the Blind Asylum!’

‘Capital!—Let me take it home to-night, Clara, and I will stand an examination on it to-morrow?’

‘We ask her whether she projects a sketch of the Paris Revolution,’ said Clara, laughing. ‘She has a famous heap of manuscripts in her desk, and one long story about a Sir Roland, who had his name before she knew Jem, but it is all unfinished; she tore out a great many pages, and has to make a new finish; and I am afraid the poor knight is going to die of a mortal wound at his lady’s feet. Isabel likes sad things best;—but oh! here they come, and I’m talking dreadful treason.’

Three more joyous-looking people could hardly have been found than those who entered the room, welcoming Louis with delight, and asking what good wind had brought him.

‘Partly that Inglewood is crying out for the master’s eye,’ said Louis; ‘and partly that my father fancied I looked fagged, and kindly let me run down for a holiday.’

‘I am of his mind,’ said Mrs. Frost, tenderly; ‘there is an M.P. expression gathering on your brows, Louis.’

‘For you to dispel, Aunt Kitty. I told him you were the best dissipation, and Virginia was of the same mind. Isabel, she says Dynevor Terrace is the only place she ever wishes to see again.’

‘Do you often see Virginia?’ asked Isabel.

‘Not unless I go early, and beg for her; and then she generally has some master. That last onset of accomplishments is serious!’

‘Yes,’ said Isabel, ‘the sense of leisure and tranquillity here is marvellous!’

‘Not leisure in the sense of idleness,’ said James.

‘No,’ said Isabel; ‘but formerly idle requirements thronged my time, and for nothing worth doing could I find leisure.’

‘There is nothing more exacting than idle requirements,’ said James. ‘Pray is Clara accepting that invitation? Come to dinner, Louis, and give us an excuse.’

‘No, he won’t,’ said Mrs. Frost, ‘he will take my side. These young people want to cast off all their neighbours.’

‘Now, granny,’ exclaimed James, ‘have we not dutifully dined all round? Did not Isabel conduct Clara to that ball? Is it not hard to reproach us with sighing at an evening immolated at the shrine of the Richardsons?’

‘Well, my dears, you must judge.’

‘I am ready to do whatever you think right; I leave you to settle it,’ said Isabel, moving out of the room, that Louis might be free for a more intimate conversation.

'Now,' cried James, 'is it in the nature of things that she should live in such society as Mrs. Walby's and Mrs. Richardson's? People who call her Mrs. James!'

'Such a queen as she looks among them!' said Clara.

'One comfort is, they don't like that,' said James. 'Even Mrs. Calcott is not flattered by her precedence. I hope we shall soon be dropped out of their parties. As long as I do my duty by their sons, what right have they to impose the penance of their society on my wife? All the irksomeness of what she has left, and none of the compensations!'

'Blissful solitude!' said Louis, 'thereto I leave you.'

'You are not going yet! You mean to dine here?' was the cry.

'My dear friends,' he said, holding up his hands, 'if you only knew how I long to have no one to speak to!'

'You crying out for silence!' exclaimed James.

'I am panting for what I have not had these five months—space for my thoughts to turn round.'

'Surely you are at liberty to form your own habits!' said James.

'I am told so whenever my father sees me receive a note,' said Louis, wearily; 'but I see that, habituated as he is to living alone, he is never really at ease unless I am in the way; so I make our hours agree as far as our respective treadmills permit; and though we do not speak much, I can never think in company.'

'Don't you have your rides to yourself?'

'Why, no. My father will never ride enough to do him good, unless he wants to do me good. People are all surprised to see him looking so well: the country lanes make him quite blooming.'

'But not you, my poor boy,' said his aunt; 'I am afraid it is a sad strain.'

'There now, Aunt Kitty, I am gone. I must have the pleasure of looking natural sometimes, without causing any vituperation of any one beyond seas.'

'You shall look just as you please if you will only stay. We are just going to dinner.'

'Thank you, let me come to-morrow. I shall be better company when I have had my sulk out.'

His aunt followed him to the stairs; and he turned to her, saying, anxiously, 'No letter?' She shook her head. 'It would be barely possible,' he said; 'but if it would only come while I am at home in peace!'

'Ah! this is sadly trying!' said she, parting his hair on his brow as he stood some steps below her, and winning a sweet smile from him.

'All for the best,' he said. 'One thing may mitigate another. That political whirlpool might suck me in, if I had any heart or hopes for it. And, on the other hand, it would be very

unwholesome to be left to my own inertness—to be as good for nothing as I feel.’

‘My poor dear boy, you are very good about it. I wish you could have been spared.’

‘I did not come to make you sad, Aunt Kitty,’ he replied, smiling; ‘no; I get some energy back when I remember that this may be a probation. Her mother would not have thought me man enough, and that is what I have to work for. Whether this end well or not, she is the leading star of my life.’ And, with the renewal of spirit with which he had spoken, he pressed his aunt’s hand, and ran down-stairs.

When he rode to Northwold, the following afternoon, having spent the morning in walking over his fields, he overtook a most comfortable couple—James and Isabel, returning from their holiday stroll; and Louis, leaving his horse at the inn, and joining them, began to hear all their school affairs. James had thrown his whole heart into his work, had been making various reforms, introducing new studies, making a point of religious instruction, and meditating on a course of lectures on history, to be given in the evenings, the attendance to be voluntary, but a prize held out for proficiency. Louis took up the subject eagerly, and Isabel entered into the discussion with all her soul, and the grammar-school did indeed seem to be in a way to become something very superior in tone to anything Northwold had formerly seen, engrossing as it did all the powers of a man of such ability, in the full vigour of youth.

Talking earnestly, the trio had reached the Terrace, and James was unlatching the iron gate, when he interrupted himself in the midst of detailing his views on modern languages to say, ‘No, I have nothing for you.’

‘Sir, I beg your pardon!’ was the quick reply from a withered, small, but not ill-dressed old man; ‘I only asked—’

‘Let the lady pass,’ said James, peremptorily, wishing to save his wife from annoyance; ‘it is of no use, I never look at petitions.’

‘Surely he is not a beggar!’ said Isabel, as he drew her on.

‘You may be easy about him, my dear,’ said James. ‘He has hold of Louis, who would swallow the whole Spanish legion of impostors. He will be after us directly with a piteous story.’

Louis was after him, with a face more than half arch fun—‘Jem, Jem, it is your uncle!’

‘Nonsense! How can you be so taken in! Don’t go and disappoint granny—I’ll settle him.’

‘Take care, Jem—it is Oliver, and no mistake! Why, he is as like you as Pendragon blood can make him! Go and beg his pardon.’

James hastened down-stairs, as Louis bounded up—sought Mrs. Frost in the sitting-rooms, and, without ceremony, rushed up and knocked at the bedroom door. Jane opened it.

‘He is come!’ cried Louis—‘Oliver is come.’

Old Jane gave a shriek, and ran back wildly, clapping her hands. Her mistress started forward—'Come!—where?'

'Here!—in the hall with Jem.'

He feared that he had been too precipitate, for she hid her face in her hands; but it was the intensity of thanksgiving; and though her whole frame was in a tremor, she flew rather than ran forward, never even seeing Louis's proffered arm. He had only reached the landing-place, when beneath he heard the greeting—'Mother, I can take you home—Cheveleigh is yours.' But to her the words were drowned in her own breathless cry—'My boy! my boy!' She saw, knew, heard nothing, save that the son, missed and mourned for thirty-four years, was safe within her arms, the longing void filled up. She saw not that the stripling had become a worn and elderly man,—she recked not how he came. He was Oliver, and she had him again! What was the rest to her?

Those words? They might be out of taste, but Fitzjocelyn guessed that to speak them at the first meeting had been the vision of Oliver's life—the object to which he had sacrificed everything. And yet how chill and unheeded they fell!

Louis could have stood moralizing, but his heart had begun to throb at the chance that Oliver brought tidings of Mary. He felt himself an intrusive spectator, and hastened into the drawing-room, when Clara nearly ran against him, but stood still. 'I beg your pardon, but what is Isabel telling me? Is it really?'

'Really! Kindred blood signally failed to speak.'

Clara took a turn up and down the room. 'I say, Louis, ought I to go down?'

'No; leave him and granny to their happiness,' said Louis; and James, at the same moment running up, threw himself into a chair, with an emphatic 'There!'

'Dear grandmamma!' said Isabel; 'I hope it is not too much for her.'

James made no answer.

'Are you disappointed in him, dear James?' she continued.

'I could not be disappointed,' he answered, shortly.

'Poor man—he has a poor welcome among you,' said Louis.

'Welcome is not to be bought,' said James. 'I could not stand hearing him reply to poor granny's heartfelt rapture with his riches and his Cheveleigh, as if that were all she could prize.'

Steps were mounting the stairs, and the alert, sharp tones of Oliver were heard—'Married then? Should have waited—done it in style.'

James and Isabel glanced at each other in amused indignation; and Mrs. Frost entered, tremulous with joy, and her bright hazel eyes lustrous with tears, as she leant on the arm of her recovered son. He was a little, spare, shrivelled man, drolly like his nephew, but with all the youthfulness dried out of him, the freckles multiplied by scores, and the keen black eyes

sunken, sharpened, and surrounded with innumerable shrewd puckers. The movements were even more brisk, as if time were money; and in speech, the small change of particles was omitted, and every word seemed bitten off short at the end; the whole man, in gesture, manner and voice, an almost grotesque caricature of all James's peculiarities.

'Mrs. Roland Dynevor, I presume?' said Oliver, as Isabel came forward to meet him.

'Never so known hitherto,' returned her husband. 'My wife is Mrs. James Frost, if you please.'

'That is over now,' said Oliver, consequentially; and as his mother presented to him 'poor Henry's little Clara,' he kissed her affectionately, saying, 'Well-grown young lady, upon my word! Like her father—that's right.'

'Here is almost another grandchild,' said Mrs. Frost—'Louis Fitzjocelyn—not much like the Fitzjocelyn you remember, but a new M.P. as he was then.'

'Humph!' said Oliver, with a dry sound, apparently expressing, 'So that is what our Parliament is made of. 'Father well?' he asked.

'Quite well, thank you, sir.'

Oliver levelled his keen eyes on him, as though noting down observations, while he was burning for tidings of Mary, yet held back by reserve and sense of the uncongeniality of the man. His aunt, however, in the midst of her own joy, marked his restless eye, and put the question, whether Mary Ponsonby had arrived?

'Ha! you let her go, did you?' said Oliver, turning on Louis. 'I told her father you'd be no such fool. He was in a proper rage at your letter, but it would have blown over if you had stuck by her, and he is worth enough to set you all on your legs.'

Louis could not bring himself to make any answer, and his mother interrupted by a question as to Doña Rosa.

'Like all the rest. Eyes and feet, that's all. Foolish business! But what possessed Ormersfield to make such a blunder? I never saw Ponsonby in such a tantrum, and his are no trifles.'

'It was all the fault of your clerk, Robson,' said James; 'he would not refute the story.'

'Sharp fellow, Robson,' chuckled Oliver; 'couldn't refute it. No; as he told me, he knew the way Ponsonby had gone on ever since his wife went home, and of late he had sent him to Guayaquil, about the Equatorial Navigation—so he had seen nothing;—and, says he to me, he had no notion of bringing out poor Miss Ponsonby—did not know whether her father would thank him; and yet the best of it is, that he pacifies Ponsonby with talking of difficulty of dealing with preconceived notions. Knows how to get hold of him—marriage would never have been if he had been there, but it was the less damage. Mary would have had more reason to have turned about if she had not found him married.'

'But, Oliver,' said his mother, 'I thought this Robson was an honest man, in whom you had entire confidence!'

'Ha! ha! d'ye think I'd put that in *any* man? No, no; he knows how far to go with me. I've plenty of checks on him. Can't get business done but by a wide-awake chap like that.'

'Is Madison under him?' asked Louis, feeling as if he had been apprenticing the boy to a chief of banditti.

'The lad you sent out? Ay. Left him up at the mines. Sharp fellow, but too raw for the office yet.'

'Too scrupulous!' said James, in an undertone, while his uncle was explaining to his mother that he could not have come away without leaving Robson to manage his affairs, and Mr. Ponsonby, telling exultingly some stories of the favourite clerk's sharp practice.

The party went down together in a not very congenial state.

Next to Mrs. Frost's unalloyed gladness, the most pleasant spectacle was old Jane, who volunteered her services in helping to wait, that she might have the delight of hovering about Master Oliver, to whom she attended exclusively, and would not let Charlotte so much as offer him the potatoes. And Charlotte was in rather an excited state at the presence of a Peruvian production, and the flutter of expecting a letter which would make her repent of the smiles and blushes she had expended over an elaborate valentine, admired as an original production, and valued the more, alas! because poor Marianne had received none. Charlotte was just beginning to repent of her ungenerous triumph; and agitation made her waiting less deft and pretty than usual; but this mattered the less, since to Oliver any attendance by women-servants was a shock, as were the small table and plain fare; and he looked round uneasily.

'Here is an old friend, Oliver,' said his mother, taking up a curious old soup-ladle.

'I see. It will take some time to get up the stock of plate. I shall give an order as I pass through London. To be engraved with the Dynevor crest as before, or would you prefer the lozenge, ma'am?'

'Oh, my dear, don't talk of it now! I am only sorry this is nothing but mutton-broth; but that's what comes of sudden arrivals, Oliver.'

'It shall be remedied at home,' said Oliver, as if he considered mutton-broth as one degree from famine.

'I know you had it for me,' said Louis. 'If Jane excels in one art before all others, it is in mutton-broth.'

Oliver darted a glance as if he imagined this compliment to be mere derision of his mother and Jane.

Things went on in this style all the evening. Oliver had two ideas—Cheveleigh, and the Equatorial Steam Navigation Company—and on these he rang the changes.

There was something striking in his devotion of a lifetime to redeem his mother's fortunes, but the grandeur was not easily

visible in the detail. He came down on Dynevor Terrace as a consequential, moneyed man, contemptuous of the poverty which he might have alleviated, and obtruding tardy and oppressive patronage. He rubbed against the new generation in too many places for charity or gratitude to be easy. He was utterly at variance with taste, and openly broached unworthy sentiments and opinions, and his kindness and his displeasure were equally irksome. If such repugnance to him were felt even by Louis, the least personally affected, and the best able to sympathize with his aunt ; it was far stronger in James, abhorring patronage, sensible that, happen what might, his present perfect felicity must be disturbed, and devoid of any sentiment for Cheveleigh that could make the restoration compensate for the obligation so unpleasantly enforced ; and Isabel's fastidious taste made her willing to hold aloof as far as might be without vexing the old lady.

There was no amalgamation. Fitzjocelyn and Isabel were near the window, talking over her former home and her sisters, and all the particulars of the society which she had left, and he had entered ; highly interesting to themselves and to the listening Clara, but to the uninitiated sounding rather like 'taste, Shakspeare, and the musical glasses.'

Oliver and his mother, sitting close together, were living in an old world ; asking and answering many a melancholy question on friends, dead or lost sight of, and yet these last they always made sure that they should find when they went home to Cheveleigh—that home to which the son reverted with unbroken allegiance ; while the whole was interspersed with accounts of his plans, and explanations of his vast designs for the renovation of the old place.

James hovered on the outskirts of both parties, too little at ease to attach himself to either ; fretted by his wife's interest in a world to which he was a stranger, impatient of his uncle's plans, and trebly angered by observing the shrewd curious glances which the old man cast from time to time towards the pair by the window. Fortunately, Mrs. Frost was still too absolutely wrapped in maternal transport to mark the clouds that were gathering over her peace. To look at her son, wait on him, and hear his voice, so fully satisfied her, that as yet it made little difference what that voice said, and it never entered her mind to suppose that all her dear ones were not sharing her bliss.

'You were the first to tell me,' she said, as she bade Louis good night with fondness additional to her messenger of good news ; but, as he pressed her dear old trembling hand, his heart misgave him whether her joy might not be turned to pain ; and when he congratulated Jane, and heard her call it a blessed day, he longed to be certain that it would prove so.

And, before he could sleep that night, he wrote a letter to Tom Madison, warning him to let no temptation nor bad

example lead him aside from strict justice and fair dealing ; and advising him rather to come home, and give up all prospects of rising, than not preserve his integrity.

James and Isabel were not merciful to their uncle when they could speak of him without restraint, and began to conjecture his intentions with regard to them.

'You don't wish to become an appendage to Cheveleigh?' said James, fondly.

'I! who never knew happiness till I came here!'

'I do not know what my uncle may propose,' said James, 'but I know you coincide in my determination that he shall never interfere with the duties of my office.'

'You do not imagine that he wishes it?'

'I know he wishes I were not in Holy Orders. I knew he disliked it at the time of my ordination ; but if he wished me to act according to his views, he should have given himself the right to dictate.'

'By not neglecting you all your youth.'

'Not that I regret or resent what concerns myself ; but it was his leaving me a burden on my grandmother that drove me to become a clergyman, and a consistent one I will be, not an idle heir-apparent to this estate, receiving it as his gift, not my own birthright.'

'An idle clergyman! Never! never!' cried Isabel. 'I should not believe it was you! And the school—you could not leave it just as your plans are working, and the boys improving?'

'Certainly not ; it would be fatal to abandon it to that stick, Powell. Ah! Isabel,' as he looked at her beautiful countenance, 'how I pity the man who has not a high-minded wife! Suppose you came begging and imploring me not to give any umbrage to the man, because you so doted upon diamonds.'

'The less merit when one has learnt that they are very cold hard stones,' said Isabel, smiling.

Isabel was a high-minded wife, but she would have been a still better one if her loving admiration had allowed her to soften James, or to question whether pride and rancour did not lurk unperceived in the midst of the really high and sound motives that prompted him.

While their grandmother could only see Oliver on the best side, James and Isabel could only see him on the worst, and lost the greatness of the design in the mercenary habits that exclusive perseverance in it had produced. It had been a false greatness, but they could not grant the elevation of mind that had originally conceived it.

The following day was Sunday, and nothing worse took place than little skirmishes, in which the uncle and nephew's retort and rejoinder were so drolly similar, that Clara found herself thinking of Miss Faithfull's two sandy cats over a mouse ; but she kept her simile to herself, finding that Isabel regarded the

faintest, gentlest comparison of the two gentlemen almost as an affront. All actual debate was staved off by Mrs. Frost's entreaty that business discussion should be deferred. 'Humph!' said Oliver, 'you reign here, ma'am, but that's not the way we get on at Lima.'

'I dare say,' said James.

Mrs. Frost's joy was still undimmed. It was almost a trance of gladness, trembling in her smile, and overflowing in her eye, at every congratulation and squeeze of the hand from her friends.

'Dear Jemmy,' said she, taking his arm as they went home in the evening, 'did not that psalm seem meant for us?—"If riches increase, set not your heart upon them."'

James had been thinking it was meant for some one; but, as he said, 'certainly not for you, dear granny.'

'Ah! snares of wealth were set far enough from me for a time! I never felt so covetous as when there was a report that there was to be an opposition school. But now your dear uncle is bringing prosperity back, I must take care not to set my heart even on what he has gained for me.'

'I defy riches to hurt you,' said James, smiling.

'Ah! Jemmy, you didn't know me as a county grandee,' she said, with a bright sad look, 'when your poor grandpapa used to dress me up. I'm an old woman now, past vanities, but I never could sit as loose to them as your own dear wife does. I never tried. Well, it will be changed enough; but I shall be glad to see poor old Cheveleigh. It does me good to hear poor Oliver call it home. If only we had your dear father!'

'To me, Dynevor Terrace is home,' said James.

'A happy home it has been,' said the old lady. "'Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life!'" And now, Oliver, whom I never thought to see again—oh! what can I do to be thankful enough! I knew what he was doing! I knew he was not what you all thought him! And roughing it has been no harm to you or Clara, and it is all over now! And the dear old place comes back to the old name. Oh, James, I can sometimes hardly contain myself—that my poor boy has done it, and all for me, and his brother's children!'

James could scarcely find it in his heart to say a single word to damp her joy, and all his resolution enabled him to do was to say gently, 'You know, dear granny, we must not forget that I am a clergyman.'

'I know. I have been telling your uncle so; but we can do something. You might take the curacy, and do a great deal of good. There used to be wild places sadly neglected in my time. I hope that, since it has been given back to us, we may feel it more as a stewardship than I did when it was mine.'

James sighed, and looked softened and thoughtful.

'Your uncle means to purchase an annuity for Jane,' she added; 'and if we could only think what to do for the Faithfulls! I

wonder whether they would come and stay with us. At least they can never vex themselves again at not paying rent !'

After a pause—'Jem, my dear, could you manage to give your uncle the true account of your marriage? He admires Isabel very much, I can tell you, and is pleased at the connection. But I fancy, though he will not say so, that Mr. Ponsonby has desired him to find out all he can about Louis; and unluckily they have persuaded themselves that poor Louis courted Isabel, supposing that she was to have Beauchastel, and, finding his error, betook himself to Mary.'

'Turning Isabel over to me! Extremely flattering.'

'Now, Jem, don't be angry. It is only foolish talk! But unluckily I can't persuade your uncle not to think the real story all my partiality; and you might do much more, if it be not too unpleasant to you.'

'Thank you, granny; it is out of the question. If it were as he does us the honour to imagine, I should be the last person to confess it. My evidence could be of no service to Fitzjocelyn, when my uncle's maxim is to place confidence in no one. The sole refutation in my power is the terms on which we meet.'

'Now, I have vexed you. I wish I had said nothing about it; but when dear Louis's happiness may depend on his report—'

'If I were base enough to have acted as he supposes, I should be base enough to deny it. There is not enough to be hoped to make me speak with unreserve on such a subject.'

He saved himself from saying—to such a man; but the shrewd, suspicious old bachelor was not an inviting confidant for the vicissitudes of delicate and tender feelings of such recent date, and Mrs. Frost reproached herself with asking too much of her proud, sensitive grandson.

The black gown and trencher cap by no means gratified Oliver, when James set off to school on Monday morning; but he consoled himself with observing, 'We shall soon put an end to that.'

'James is quite devoted to the school,' said Isabel; and she was answered by the dry growl.

'It will be a hard thing to transplant our young people,' said Mrs. Frost; 'they have managed to be very happy here.'

'So hard of transplantation, that I doubt the possibility,' said Isabel. 'You have made us take very deep root here.'

'Have you ever seen Cheveleigh, Mrs Dynevor?'

'Never.'

'Poor Oliver! you and I think no place equal to our birth-place,' said Mrs. Frost.

'I should think Mrs. Roland Dynevor would find it compensation. How many beds did we make up, mother, the year my father was sheriff?'

'You must go to Jane for that,' said his mother, laughing. 'I'm sure I never knew.'

'I believe it was twenty-seven,' said Oliver gravely. 'I know

there were one hundred and eighty-five persons at the ball, and that the room was hung with blue brocade, mother ; and you opened the ball with Lord Francis. I remember you had violet satin and white blonde.'

'My dear, how can you remember such things? You were a little bit of a schoolboy.'

'I was fourteen,' said Oliver. 'It was the year '13. I will have the drawing-room hung with blue brocade, and I think Mrs. Roland Dynevor will own that nothing can exceed it.'

'Very likely,' said Isabel, indifferently ; and she escaped, beckoning with her Clara, who was rather entertained with the reminiscences over which granny and Uncle Oliver seemed ready to linger for ever ; and yet she was rather ashamed of her amusement and interest, when she heard her sister-in-law say, 'If he did but know how weary I am of that hateful thing, a great house!'

'I hope Cheveleigh is not grander than Ormersfield,' said Clara, in an odd sort of voice.

The ladies, for the first time, did not sit together this morning. Clara practised, and Isabel took the *Chapel in the Valley* out of her desk, and began a process of turning the Sir Roland into Sir Hubert.

Oliver and his mother were in the sitting-room, and, on James's return from school in the middle of the day, he was summoned thither. Mrs. Frost was sitting by the fire, rather tearful and nervous, and her son stood full in the front, as dignified and magnanimous as size and features would permit, and the same demeanour was instantly and unconsciously assumed by his nephew, who was beyond measure chafed by the attempt at a grand *coup*.

'I have requested your presence,' began Oliver, 'as the eldest son of my elder brother, and thus, after my mother, the head of our family. You are aware that when unfortunate circumstances involved my mother's property, it was my determination to restore the inheritance to her, and to my dear brother Henry. For this object I have worked for the last thirty-four years, and a fortunate accident having brought our family estate into the market, I have been enabled to secure it. I am now ready to make it over to my mother, with entail to yourself and your heirs, as representatives of my brother Henry, and settling five thousand pounds on your sister, as the portion to which the younger children of our family have always been entitled. If you are willing to reside at our family seat with my mother, I will assure you of a suitable allowance during her lifetime, and—'

Nothing was more intolerable to a man like James than a shower of obligations ; and his spirit, angered at the very length of the address, caught at the first opening for avoiding gratitude, and beheld in the last proposal an absolute bribe to make him sacrifice his sacred ministry, and he burst forth, 'Sir, I am much

obliged to you, but no offers shall induce me to forsake the duties of my calling.'

'You mistake, if you think I want anything unclerical. No occasion to hunt—Mr. Tresham used in my day—no one thought the worse of him—unlucky your taking Orders.'

'There is no use in entering on that point,' said James. 'No other course was left open to me, and my profession cannot be taken up nor laid down as a matter of convenience.'

'Young men are taught to think more seriously than they were in our day,' said Mrs. Frost. 'I told you that you must not try to make him turn squire.'

'Well! well! good living may be had perhaps. Move to Cheveleigh, and look out for it at leisure, if nothing else will content him. But we'll have this drudgery given up. I'll not go home and show my nephew, heir of the Dynevors, keeping a third-rate grammar-school,' said Oliver, with his one remaining Eton quality of contempt for provincial schools.

The Northwold scholar and master were both roused to arms in James.

'Sir,' he said, 'you should have thought of that when you left this heir of the Dynevors to be educated by the charity of this third-rate grammar-school.'

'Is this your gratitude, sir?' passionately exclaimed Oliver; 'I, who have toiled my whole life for your benefit, might look for another return.'

'It was not for me,' said James. 'It was for family pride. Had it been from the affection that claims gratitude, you would not have left your mother, in her old age, to labour unaided for the support of your brother's orphans. For ourselves, I thank you; the habits nurtured by poverty are the best education; but I cannot let you suppose that a grand theatrical restoration can atone to me for thirty years' neglect of my grandmother, or that my gratitude can be extorted by benefactions at the expense of her past suffering.'

'Jem! dear Jem! what are you saying?' cried Mrs. Frost. 'Don't you know how kindly your uncle meant? Don't you know how happy we have been?'

'You may forgive. You are his mother, and you were injured; but I can never forget what I have seen you undergo.'

'You foolish boy, to forget all our happiness—'

'Nor,' proceeded James, 'can I consent to forego the career of usefulness that has been opened to me.'

'But, Jem, you could be so useful in the parish! and your uncle could not wish you to do anything unhandsome by the trustees—'

'I wish him to do nothing, ma'am,' said Oliver. 'If he is too high and mighty to accept a favour, it is his own loss. We can do without him, if he prefers the Fitzjocelyn patronage. Much good may it do him!'

James deigned no answer; looked at his watch, and found it time to return to the school.

Oliver broke out into angry exclamations, and his mother did her utmost to soothe him. He had no turn for being a country gentleman; he was fit for nothing but his counting-house, and he intended to return thither as soon as he had installed his mother at Cheveleigh; and so entirely did all his plans hinge upon his nephew, that even now he was persuaded to hold out his forgiveness, on condition that James would apologize, resign the school, and call himself Dynevor.

Mrs. Frost hoped that Isabel would prevail on her husband to listen favourably; but Isabel gloried in his impracticability, and would have regarded any attempt at mediation as an unworthy effort to turn him aside from the path of duty. She replied, that she would never say a word to change his notions of right, and she treated poor Oliver with all the lofty reserve that she had formerly practised upon possible suitors.

When Fitzjocelyn came in the afternoon to take leave, before his return to London, Mrs. Frost begged him to use his influence with James. 'Who would have thought it would have so turned out?' she said. 'My poor Oliver! to be so met after all his generous plans! and yet Jem does want to do right!'

Unfortunately, Louis felt that, to own Oliver's generosity, it was necessary to be out of sight of him; and finding that there was silence and constraint in the drawing-room, he asked Isabel to walk with him to meet James.

'One breathes freely!' said she, as they left the house. 'Was there ever a more intolerable man?'

'Never was a man who made a more unlucky error in judgment.'

'And that is all you call it?'

'The spurious object warped the mind aside,' said Louis. 'The grand idea was too exclusive, and now he suffers for the exclusiveness. It is melancholy to see the cinder of a burnt-offering to Mammon, especially when the offering was meant for better things.'

In this strain he chose to talk, without coming to particulars, till, near the corner of the old square, they met the shouting throng of boys, and presently James himself, descending the steps of the grim old gray building.

'I thought you would forgive me for coming to meet you under such an escort,' said Isabel, 'especially as it was to escape from our Peruvian relative.'

'Poor man! it was a great pity he did not come last year!' said Louis.

'I am glad I have no temptation to bend to his will,' returned James.

'Ha! I like the true core of the quarrel to display itself.'

'Fitzjocelyn, you do not mean that you do not fully approve of the course I have taken!'

'Extremely magnanimous, but not quite unprecedented.'

Witness *St. Ronan's Well*, where the younger Scrogie abjures the name of Mowbray.'

'Pshaw! Louis, can't you understand? Frost is a glorious name to me, recording my grandmother's noble exertions on our behalf; but I can imagine it to be hateful to him, recalling the neglect that made her slaving necessary.'

'For which amiable reason you insist on obtruding it. Pray, are the houses henceforth to be Frost Terrace or Arctic Row?'

'Are you come to laugh or to remonstrate?' exclaimed James, stopping.

'Oh! you want to put on your armour! Certainly, I should never tell if I were come to remonstrate, nor should I venture in such a case—'

'Then you are come to approve,' said Isabel. 'I knew it!'

'Little you two care—each of you sure of an admiring double.'

'I care for your opinion as much as ever I did,' said James.

'Exactly so,' said Louis, laughing.

'I desire to have your judgment in this matter.'

'If I could judge, I would,' said Louis. 'I see you right in principle, but are you right in spirit? I own my heart bleeds for Aunt Kitty, regaining her son to battle with her grandson.'

'I am very sorry for her,' said James; 'but it can't be helped. I cannot resign my duties here for the sake of living dependent on a suitable allowance.'

'Ah! Jem! Jem! Oliver little knew the damage his neglect did you.'

'What damage?'

'The fostering an ugly little imp of independence.'

'Aye! you grandees have naturally a distaste for independence, and make common cause against it.'

'Especially when in a rabid state. Take care, Jem. Independence never was a Christian duty yet—'

'Then, you want me to go and live on the hoards for the sake of which my grandmother was left to toil. You would like to see me loitering about, pensioned to swell the vanity of Cheveleigh, neglecting my vows, forsaking my duties—'

'You unreasonable man! Is there no way in this whole world for you to do your duty as a clergyman, but hearing Northwold boys the Latin grammar?'

'Then, what do you want me to do?'

'I don't want you to do anything. You are the man to know what is right; only, Isabel, don't help him to hate people more than can possibly be avoided; and don't break dear Aunt Kitty's heart amongst you. That's what I care most about!'

When Louis bade his aunt farewell, he threw his arm round her neck, looked fondly at her, and said, 'Dear aunt, you won't let them tease you?'

'No, my dear, I am getting past being teased,' she said. 'Vexations don't hurt me as much as love does me good, and they'll not forget their affection. It is all goodness in Jem, and poor Oliver will understand it when I have got him into our home ways again; but he has been so long away from home, poor fellow!'

'That's right. I won't be uneasy for you. Squabble as they will, they won't hurt you. But, oh! Dynevor Terrace without you!'

'Ah! you must come to me at home!'

'Home! I'm like Jem, jealous for this old house.'

'It is odd how little I feel these things,' said his aunt. 'If any one had told me, when I tore myself away from Cheveleigh, that I should have it back, how little I should have thought that I could take it so easily! I wonder at myself when I wake in the morning that I am not more moved by it, nor by leaving this dear old place. I suppose it is because I have not long to stay anywhere. I can keep nothing in my head, but that I have got my Oliver!'

'I believe it is the peace that is not of this world!' said Louis.

CHAPTER XXIX

ROLAND AND OLIVER

'Twas old ancestral pride,
'Twas hope to raise a fallen house
From penury's disgrace,
To purchase back from usurers
The birthright of his race.

The Lump of Gold.—C. MACKAY

MARY's letter arrived not long after Louis's return to London; and her calm, serious, beautifully-expressed farewell came upon him at last like a blow which had been long impending, but of which preparation had failed to lessen the weight.

'Ah!' said the Earl, when the chief part had been read to him, 'she is admirable and excellent as ever. It is a great disappointment that she is unattainable; but I am glad she writes so sensibly, and sees that it is right you should think no more about her. After all, the connection with that fellow Ponsonby might have been very troublesome, and it is well, as she says, that it was all over while you are so young.'

'Young or old, there is no other Mary in the world,' said Louis, sadly.

'We will say no more about it now. I understand you, but you will think differently by and by.'

Louis did not answer. He knew that others might have been deceived by the tardiness and uncertainty of his attachment; but that it had taken such deep root, that he believed he could

no more detach himself from Mary than if she were his wife. His heart fainted as he thought of years without the strength and soothing which her very letter breathed forth ; as he pictured to himself alternations between his chill and stately home and the weary maze of London, foresaw persuasions from his father to induce him to form some new attachment, and dreaded to think of the facility with which, perhaps, he might still be led out of his own convictions. Yet he still believed that patience and perseverance would win the day, and tried to derive encouragement and energy from the thought that this might be a trial sent for the very purpose of training him in steadfastness.

A strong impulse drew him to Bryanston Square, where Miss Ponsonby was very kind and warm, the more so because she had discovered how much easier it had been to say than to unsay, and strongly regretted the injustice she had done him. He had the satisfaction of talking for a good hour about Mary, and of sending a message, that he did not write because he wished to be guided by her in everything, and that he was striving to work so as to please her. The conversation ended with some good auguries as to the effect of Oliver's return to Peru ; and Louis went away cheered, bearing the final dismissal better than his father had expected. Lord Ormersfield attributed his tranquillity to having his mind settled ; and so it was, though not quite as his lordship imagined.

Meantime, there was a lull at Dynevor Terrace. Oliver was gone to take possession and furnish the mansion, and Mrs. Frost's great object was to keep the subject from irritating her grandson, so as to save him from binding himself by any rash vows. Cheveleigh was treated in the domestic circle with judicious silence : Oliver's letters were read by his mother in private, and their contents communicated to Jane alone, whose happiness was surpassing, and her contempt for Dynevor Terrace quite provoking to poor Mrs. Martha.

'Really,' said Charlotte, one day, 'I don't think a catastrophe is half so pretty as it ought to be. Mr. Oliver is but a poor little puny man, and I never knew Mr. James so hard to please.'

Charlotte and Marianne had begun to merge their rivalry in honest friendship, cemented by Marianne's increasing weakness, and difficulty in getting through even the light work her mistress required. Jane petted her now still more than Charlotte, and was always promising her the delightful air and the luxuries of Cheveleigh.

'See here, Charlotte,' said Marianne, one afternoon when they sat down together to their sewing ; Marianne's eyes were brighter, and her cheeks pinker, than for many days,—'see here ; it is for your good I show it you, that you mayn't build on no false expectations. It was marked private ; but I think it but fair you should see.'

'Mine was marked private, too,' said Charlotte, slowly, as she fixed her eyes on the envelope Marianne held out to her, and

putting her hand into her pocket, pulled out a similar one, directed to Miss Arnold.

Marianne scarcely suppressed a shriek, gasped, and turned pale. Each lady then proceeded to unfold a pink sheet of note-paper, containing an original copy of verses, each labelled, 'On a hair of —.' Then came a scented shining note, requesting to be informed whether the right construction had been put on some words that had dropped from the Miss Conways, and if it were true that the reverend and respected Mr. F. Dynevor had come into a large fortune. In that case, Mr. Delaford, mercenary considerations apart, would take the earliest opportunity of resigning his present position, and entering the family which contained his charmer.

The *Merry Wives* were parodied by the hysterical maids; Charlotte might afford to laugh, but Marianne's heart was more in the matter, and they struck up such a chorus that Jane broke upon them, declaring that they would frighten Mrs. James Frost out of her senses. When Charlotte told her what was the matter, her comment was, 'And a very good thing, too, that you should find him out in time! A pair of silly girls, you! I always was thankful I never could write, to be deluded with nonsense by the post; and I am more so than ever now! Come, leave off crying, Marianne; he ain't worth it.'

'But how shall we answer him, Mrs. Beckett?' said Charlotte.

'Never demean yourself to answer him,' said Jane; 'let him never hear nought about you—that's the best for the like of him. I can tell him he need not be in no hurry about giving warning to Lady Conway. At Cheveleigh we'll have a solemn, steady butler, with no nonsense, nor verses, nor guitars—forty years old—and a married man.'

Charlotte took the advice, and acted with dignified contempt and silence, relieved to imagine that Tom had never been in danger from such a rival. Marianne did not divulge the tender and melancholy letter of reproach that she posted privately; but she grew paler, and coughed more, all that bright summer.

Mrs. Frost had refused to let any cause remove her from Northwold, until after an event which it was hoped would render James less disdainful of his inheritance. But—'Was there ever anything more *contrary*?' exclaimed Jane, as she prepared to set out the table for a grand tea. 'There's Master James as pleased and proud of that there little brown girl, as if she was as fine a boy as Master Henry himself. I do believe, upon my word, it is all to spite poor dear Master Oliver.'

Poor Jane! she was almost growing tart in her partisanship of Oliver.

The little brown girl was no dove of peace. Her father decidedly triumphed in the mortification that her sex was to others of the family; and though he averred that the birth of a son would not have made him change his mind, he was well satisfied to be spared the attack which would have ensued.

Oliver, like Jane, appeared to regard the poor child as a wilful offence, and revenged himself by a letter announcing that Clara would be his heiress; information which Mrs. Frost kindly withheld from her granddaughter, in the hope of a reconciliation.

Lord Ormersfield took James in hand, undertaking to make him hear common sense; but the sense was unfortunately too common, and the authoritative manner was irritating, above all when a stately warning was given that no Church preferment was to be expected from his influence; whereupon James considered himself insulted, and they parted very stiff and grand, the Earl afterwards pronouncing that nothing was so wrong-headed as a conscientious man. But they were too much accustomed to be on respectfully quarrelsome terms to alter their regard for one retort more or less; and after all, there were very few men whom Lord Ormersfield liked or esteemed half so much as the fearless and uncompromising James Frost—James Frost, as he curtly signed himself, in spite of all Louis's wit on Rolands and Olivers—and yet those soft satirical speeches did more than all direct attacks to shake his confidence in his own magnanimity; more especially because Fitzjocelyn always declared himself incompetent to judge, and never failed to uphold that he was so far right, that his ministry must stand above all worldly considerations.

The breach had become so wide, that Oliver would not have accepted the terms he had formerly offered. His object seemed to be to pique his nephew and niece, by showing them what they had lost. He wrote the most magnificent descriptions of Cheveleigh, and insisted that his mother and Clara should come and take possession on the eightieth birthday of the former, the 14th of September; and Isabel was recovering so rapidly, that there was nothing to oppose to his project, although the new Catharine would be scarcely three weeks old by that time.

Thereupon came down, addressed to Clara, a case of Peruvian jewels, newly set in London—intended doubtless to excite great jealousy in her sister-in-law. Poor Oliver! could he but have known that Isabel only glanced at them to tell Clara the names of the ornaments, and to relieve her mind by assurances that the whole of a set need not be worn at once! Next arrived an exceedingly smart French milliner, who, by the help of Jane and Marianne, got Clara into her toils, and pinned and measured her for a whole mortal morning; and even grandmamma ordered a black velvet gown and accompaniments.

Lastly, there descended on Clara's devoted head a cheque for a sum which terrified her imagination, and orders to equip herself suitably as Miss Dynevor of Cheveleigh, who was to enjoy the same allowance half-yearly. Her first idea was what delightful presents could be made to every one; but as she was devising showers of gifts for her niece, James cut her short—'I am sorry to give you pain, Clara, but it must be understood that neither directly nor indirectly can I nor mine receive anything bought with my uncle's money.'

'That was the only thing to make me not hate it.'

'It is best you should hate it.'

'I do! Why did he come home to bother us? Oh, Jem, can't I still live here, and only visit there?'

'No, Clara. The care of granny is your first duty; and during her life, so long as you are single, her home must be yours.'

The edict was given in stern self-abnegation; but James was very kind to her, treating her as a victim, and spending his leisure in walking about with her, that she might take leave of every favourite haunt. He was indulgent enough even to make no objection to going with her to Ormersfield, where she wandered about the park, visited old scenes with Louis, and went over all his improvements. His cottages had as yet the sole fault of looking too new, and one of his tenants would not shut up his pigs; but otherwise all was going on well, and Inglewood was in the excitement of Louis's first harvest. He walked about with ears of wheat in his hand, talked knowingly of loads and acres, and had almost taught his father to watch the barometer. It added to Clara's regrets that she should miss the harvest-supper, for which he and Mr. Holdsworth had wonderful designs; but it was not to take place until Fitzjocelyn's return from Cheveleigh. Oliver had invited him and his father to conduct Mrs. Frost thither, and add *éclat* to her reception; and this, as Clara said, 'was the only comfort in the business.'

James had effectually destroyed all pleasure on her part, and had made the change appear an unmitigated misfortune, even though she did not know what she would have thought the worst. Congratulations were dreadful to her, and it was all that Isabel could do to persuade her to repress her dislike so as not to distress her grandmother.

To Mrs. Frost it was pain to leave what she owned, with thankful tears, to have been a happy, peaceful refuge for her widowhood and poverty; she grieved over each parting, clung to the Faithfulls, reiterated fond counsels to Isabel, and could hardly bear to detach herself from the great-grandchild. But still it was her own son, and her own home, and Oliver and Cheveleigh were more to her than even James and Dynevor Terrace; so that, though she was sorry, it was not with a melancholy sorrow, and she could still hope against hope, that uncle and nephew might be brought together at last, and that a son of James would yet reign in the dear old place.

Besides, she had not time to be unhappy. She was fully employed in nursing Isabel, doing honour to the little one, answering Oliver's letters, superintending Clara's wardrobe; choosing parting gifts for innumerable friends, high and low; and making arrangements for the inexperienced household.

Jane's place was to be—not exactly supplied, but occupied by a cook. Miss Dynevor was to have 'a personal attendant;' and Mrs. Beckett begged that Marianne might be chosen, since she could not bear to see the poor thing sent away, when in so

much need of care. The diamonds, the French millinery, and Jane's motherly care, came in strong contrast to the miserable lodging, or the consumptive hospital, which poor Marianne had begun to anticipate; and weeping with gratitude, she declared that she had never seen nor thought of such kindness since her mother died.

Isabel seldom roused herself to understand anything about her servants; but she liked Marianne, and was glad Clara should have her, since she was not strong enough to undertake nursery cares. She believed it had not agreed with her to sit up late. Compunction for having been the cause had never dawned on Isabel's mind.

Charlotte was to remain at Dynevor Terrace; James and Isabel wished to keep her, and Mrs. Beckett thought her sufficiently indoctrinated with her ways to have some chance of going on well. 'Besides,' as Jane said, 'I can't be accountable for taking her into that large family, until I see what company there may be. She's a well-behaved girl enough, but she's too pretty and too simple-like for me to have her among the common run of servants. I'll see what I can do for her, when I see what sort of a housekeeper it is.'

And Jane gave Charlotte infinite injunctions, varying from due care of the 'chaney images' to reserve with mankind. 'Because you see, Charlotte,' she said, 'you'll be terribly forsaken. Mrs. James, poor dear!—she would not know if the furniture weren't rubbed once in ten years; but you must make it a pride to yourself to be faithful.'

'I am faithful!' cried Charlotte. 'I never cared for that traitor, Delaford, and his guitar; but I could not get rid of him. And I'll tell you what—I'll seal up his fine red book, and all his verses; and you shall leave them in London as you go through, with my compliments. I think that will be proper and scornful.'

'Hoity-toity! That's what she's at! The best thing you can do too, Charlotte; and I'm glad that you've too much spirit to pine like poor Marianne. I'd take my affidavit that if the crowner could sit upon her when she dies,—and die she will—that there fine gentleman and his guitar will be found at the bottom of her chest. But don't go off about that now—though 'tis the reason I won't part from the poor thing till I can help—the better luck for you that you'd got more in your head than vanities and furbelows. What I meant was not being faithful to him out in Peru—that's your own affair; but the being faithful to your duty to your mistress, whether she's after you or not. You know what a good servant is, and you've got to show it ain't all eye-service.'

Charlotte cried heartily. No one else was allowed that privilege when the 13th came, excepting Mrs. Frost herself. James, afraid that a scene would hurt his wife, severely forbade Clara to give way; and the poor girl, mute and white, did as

she was told, and ventured not a word of farewell, though her embraces were convulsive, and when she went down-stairs she could not help kissing Charlotte.

James handed his grandmother to her seat in the carriage which was to take her to the station.

'Good-bye, my dear,' she said ; 'I know the day will come when all this will be made up. You know how I have loved you both.'

'I wish my uncle all good.'

'I see it now,' she said, holding his hand between both of hers. 'It is my fault. I fostered our family pride. May God take away the sin from us both !'

The words were hardly articulate through tears, and perhaps James did not hear. He hurried Clara down the garden and into the carriage, and she had her last nod from Miss Faithfull at the open window. Miss Mercy was at the station, whither school-hours had hindered James from accompanying them, but where they found Lord Ormersfield and Louis.

The warm-hearted little woman was all tears and smiles. 'Oh ! dear Mrs. Frost, I am so sorry, and yet it is selfish. I am so happy ! but where shall we find such another neighbour ?'

'Come and see us. You know you are to persuade your sister.'

'Ah !' She shook her head. 'Salome is hard to move. But you—you are such a traveller—you will come to see Mr. James ?'

'I'm eighty to-morrow : I little expect to make any more journeys except one, Mercy. I never look to see poor Northwold more ; but it has been a place of blessings to me, and you have been one of them. Don't think I'm too glad to go away ; but I cannot but be thankful that my dear boy is bringing me home to lay me down where my father and his father lie.'

It was said with that peculiar cheerfulness with which happy old age can contemplate the end of the pilgrimage ; and she looked at Louis with a sunny smile.

CHAPTER XXX

THE RESTORATION

When silent time, wi' lightly foot,
Had trod on thirty years,
I sought again my native land
Wi' mony hopes and fears.
As I drew near my ancient pile
My heart beat a' the way ;
The place I passed seemed yet to speak
Of some dear former day.
Some pensy chiefs, a new-sprung race,
Wad next their welcome pay ;
* * * * *
But sair on ilka well-kenned face
I missed the youthful bloom.—MISS BLAMIRE

OLIVER had sent orders to his mother to sleep in London, and proceed the next morning by a train which would arrive at about two o'clock.

On that eventful morning, Clara was the prey of Mrs. Beckett, Marianne, and the French milliner; and in such a flounced glacé silk, such a lace mantle, and such a flowery bonnet was she arrayed, that Lord Ormersfield bowed to her as a stranger, and Louis talked of the transformations of the Giraffe. 'Is it not humiliating,' she said, 'to be so altered by finery? You might dress Isabel for ever, and her nobleness would surmount it all.'

'If you are not the rose, at least you have lived near the rose,' said Louis. 'You don't fall quite short of the character of Miss Dynevor.'

'I wish I were going to school,' said Clara, as they passed along familiar streets; 'then, at least, some one would pity me.'

After two hours spent on the railroad, the train entered a district with the bleakness, but not the beauty, of the neighbourhood of mountains; the fresh September breeze was laden with smoke, and stations stood thick upon the line. As the train dashed up to one of these, a flag was seen waving, and the shout of 'Cheveleigh, Cheveleigh road!' greeted them.

On the platform stood a tall footman, in the most crimson of coats, powdered hair, and a stupendous crimson and white shoulder-knot, such as Clara had only seen going to St. James's. She would never have imagined that she had any concern with such splendour; but her grandmother asked him if the carriage were there, as a mere matter of course, and Jane devolved on him all luggage cares, as coolly as if she had been ruling over him all his life.

As they issued from the station, a thin, uncertain, boyish cheer rang out, and before them stood a handsome open carriage and four chestnut horses, with crimson postilions, and huge crimson-and-white satin rosettes.

'Won't they all turn to rats and pumpkins?' whispered Clara to Louis.

'Bless the poor boy!' cried Mrs. Frost, between laughing and crying; 'what has he been about? Does he think I am the Sheriff's lady still?'

The party entered the carriage, and the crowd of little boys and girls, flymen and porters, got up another 'hurrah!' as the four horses went thundering off, with Mrs. Frost apologizing—'Poor Oliver's notions were on such a grand scale!—He had been so long absent, that he did not know how much these things had been disused.' But no one could look at her bright tearful eyes, and quivering mouth, without seeing that she exulted in her son's affection and his victory; and after all it was natural to her, and a resumption of old habits.

They drove through two miles of brown flat heath, with far-away mountain outlines, which she greeted as dear friends. Here and there the engine-house of a mine rose up among shabby buildings, and by and by was seen a square church-tower, with lofty pinnacles, among which floated forth a flag. The old lady caught hold convulsively of Clara's hand—'The

old church!—My old church!—See, Clara, that is where your dear grandfather lies!—My last home!’

With brimming eyes Mrs. Frost gazed on it as it came forth more distinctly, and Clara looked with a sense of awe; but rending her away from grave thoughts, shouts burst upon her ears, and above them the pealing crash of all the bells, as they dashed under a splendid triumphal arch, all evergreens and dahlias, forming the word ‘Welcome!’ and were met by a party on horseback waving their hats, while a great hurrah burst out from the numbers who lined the street. Mrs. Frost bowed her thanks and waved her hand. ‘But oh!’ she said, almost sobbing, ‘where am I? This is not Cheveleigh.’

Lord Ormersfield showed her a few old houses that they both recognized, looking antiquated in the midst of a modern growth of narrow, concealed new tenements. The shouting crowd had, to Fitzjocelyn’s eyes, more the aspect of a rabble than of a genuine rejoicing peasantry. What men there were looked beer-attracted rather than reputable, and the main body were whooping boys, women, nurse-girls, and babies. The suspicion crossed him that it was a new generation, without memories of forty years since, wondering rather than welcoming, in spite of arches, bells, and shouts.

After another half-mile, a gate swung wide beneath another arch, all over C. D., the F. studiously omitted; and the carriage wheeled in amid a shower of tight little nosegays from a squadron of school-children. They drove up the long approach, through fir plantations, which drew from Mrs. Frost a cry of friendly recognition—for her husband had planted them; but they had not taken kindly to the soil, and fifty years had produced but a starveling growth. Beyond lay an expanse of parched brown turf, here and there an enclosure of unprosperous trees, and full in front stood the wide space of stuccoed wall, with a great Gothic window full in the midst, and battlements in the castellated style of the early years of the nineteenth century.

No one spoke. After the first glance, Mrs. Frost shut her eyes to restrain the hot tears that arose at the thought of the wintry morning, when ice-drops hung hoary on the fir-trees, as she had driven away from the portal, whence music was now pealing forth a greeting, and where Oliver was standing on the very spot where, with clenched hand, he had vowed that all should be restored.

Alas! how much was in his power to restore!

Gaily-dressed people surrounded the entrance, and, amid triumphant strains from the band, the carriage stopped, and Oliver held out his hand, saying, ‘Welcome home, mother!’

She leant forward, kissed his brow, and suffered him to lead her up the steps to the hall-door, Lord Ormersfield conducting Clara. At the door Mrs. Frost paused, to turn, curtsy, and sign her thanks to the throng who had followed. Her noble

aspect and demeanour, so full of dignity and feeling, obtained a fresh and more genuine acclamation ; but throughout there was a strange sense of unreality ; she seemed like one performing a part to gratify her son. Clara asked her cousin if it were not like acting a play ; and it was plain to him that the spectators beheld it with more curiosity than sympathy.

They were a new race. Property had changed hands rapidly in a region of trade and manufacture, and the old Dynevor name had been forgotten past recall, amid the very population who were thriving upon the identical speculations which had swamped Mr. Frost's fortune. If the crowd without looked like a mob, the assembly within had a *parvenu* appearance ; and as Oliver handed his mother across the hall, he muttered something, as if he were disappointed both in the number and consequence of his guests.

He led her into a magnificent apartment, all gilding, blue brocade, and mirrors, as far as might be after the model of the days of the Shrievalty ; but the bare splendour could ill recall the grace and elegance that had then reigned there without effort. Peru had not taught Oliver taste either of the eye or of the mind, and his indefatigable introductions—' My mother, Mrs. Dynevor, my niece, Miss Dynevor, Lord Ormersfield, Lord Fitzjocelyn,' came so repeatedly as quite to jingle in their ears.

Sir Andrew Britton, a burly cotton lord, with a wife in all the colours of the rainbow, seemed to be the grand guest. His lady seated herself beside Mrs. Frost, and began to tell her, with a tone of patronage, how good a neighbourhood it was, and how much pleasure she should have in introducing Miss Dynevor.

In vain did Mrs. Frost look for a face she knew, and inquire from her new acquaintance after familiar old names of places and people. The places were either become factories, or some charming new family lived there ; and for the people, it seemed as if she might as well ask for antediluvians ; Lady Britton had seldom heard their names, or if any trace survived, they had never been on her visiting list.

At last Oliver came up to her, saying, ' Here, ma'am, Mr. Henderson claims an early acquaintance with you.'

' Mr. Henderson !' and she eagerly started up, but looked baffled.

' Little George Henderson,' said the gray-headed gentleman—for once a *real* gentleman—' I assure you I have not forgotten the happy days I have spent here.'

' Little George !' as she took him by both hands—' who would have thought it ! You were little George with the apple cheeks. And are no more of you here ?'

He shook his head sadly. ' They would have been even more glad than I am to welcome you home ; they were older, and knew you better.'

' Ah ! I must learn to ask no questions. And yet, that dear sister Fanny of yours—'

'Gone many years since, ma'am. She died in India. I hope my daughter Fanny may put you a little in mind of her.'

'Is she not here?'

'Why, no. I wished to bring her, but she is but fifteen, and mamma will not trust her out without herself. We are quiet people, and the world is growing too gay for us.'

'Clara and I must come to find you out. Can you believe this tall creature is poor dear Henry's daughter?' as Clara hastened to greet her father's playfellow, with an alacrity which piqued Lady Britton into a supercilious aside to Lord Fitzjocelyn that the Hendersons were in poor circumstances, and no one visited them.

'And is no one here whom I know? Not one of the old set, George?' asked the old lady, mournfully.

'I fear there is hardly any one,' said Mr. Henderson. 'All seem even to me new people. Stay, do you recollect old Mrs. Golding?'

After a little confusion, Mr. Henderson's old Mrs. Golding proved to be Mrs. Frost's young Mrs. Golding; and, on the eager inquiry whether she were present, ensued the melancholy answer that she was deaf and infirm, only just able to smile with pleasure at the tidings of her old friend's restoration; and the daughter, whom she could only just believe to be grown up, was a worn, elderly woman. Not even the one heartfelt greeting was without sadness; and Clara likewise met with one solitary satisfaction, and that a very mixed one. Mr. Danvers, the young curate, whom Oliver had not thought worth presenting, was hailed by Fitzjocelyn as if their slight Oxford acquaintance had been an intimacy, and was by him introduced to Clara as belonging to James's college. She frankly held out her hand, but was discomfited by his inquiry for her brother, whom he had hoped to meet. Louis said something about not expecting the schoolmaster abroad in the half-year, and Clara was not at all grateful to him for relieving her from the embarrassment, but regarded the reply as a shabby prevarication, and was much inclined to speak out; but Louis was drawing the curate into conversation about the population, and hearing but a desponding history. It was interrupted when Oliver, after waiting in vain for more distinguished company, began to marshal his guests to the grand hall, paved with black and white marble, and with a vast extent of wall and window, decked with evergreens, flags, and mottoes. Here a cold collation was prepared, with a band in a music-gallery above, and all the *et ceteras* dear to county papers. Oliver himself handed in Lady Britton, his mother fell to the lot of the Earl, and Fitzjocelyn received orders to conduct a handsome, young, giggling Mrs. Smithers, who, never having been in contact with a live lord, wanted to make the most of him, and, before she had arrived at her place, was declaring that it was a most interesting occasion, just like a scene at the Opera.

Louis glanced back to see what became of Clara, and, finding her following with Sir Andrew Britton, contrived to sit immediately opposite to her, at the long, narrow table, with nothing between them but a couple of cold chickens and a tongue garnished with transfixed crayfish. His eyes were, perhaps, a greater support to her than even conversation ; for she gathered a little philosophy and charity from their cheering smile and arch twinkling, and she managed to listen civilly to her neighbour, while she saw that her cousin was being very polite to Mrs. Smithers. She was a great way from all other friends, for the table had been spread for a more numerous assembly, and the company sat in little clusters, with dreary gaps between, where moulds of jelly quaked in vain, and lobster-salads wasted their sweetness on the desert air. Her uncle could just be seen in the far perspective at the head of the table ; and, between him and the Earl, Louis descried his Aunt Catharine, looking bright, with a little embellishing flush on her withered cheek.

Sir Andrew was not a lady's man ; and, after he had heard how far Miss Dynevor had come to-day, that she had never ridden, and had not seen the Menai tubular bridge, he discontinued the difficult task ; and she, finding that he had not even seen the cathedral, which she had passed only fifteen miles off, gave him up, and occupied herself with watching the infinite variety of affectations which Mrs. Smithers was playing off, and the grave diversion with which Louis received them. The lady was evidently trying to discover what had been the intermediate history of Mrs. and Miss Dynevor ; and Louis was taking pleasure in baffling her, with cool, quiet answers, especially when she came to the question whether Miss Dynevor had not a brother, and why he was not present. It appeared that Oliver had made almost as if his mother had been buried and dug up again ; involving the thirty-four years of her exile in such utter mystery, that people had begun to make all sorts of wild stories to account for her proceedings ; and Lord Fitzjoelyn's explanation that she had lived in her own house in Northwold, and taught him the Latin grammar, seemed quite a disappointment from the simplicity and want of romance.

The weary banquet had arrived at ices, and Clara hoped the end was near, when the worse trial of speeches began. Mr. Henderson was declaring how strongly he felt the honour which had been devolved on him, of expressing the universal joy in having so excellent and much-beloved a neighbour restored by the noble exertions of her son. He said all that the rest of the world ought to have felt, and so heartily and sincerely as to make every one imagine the whole the general sentiment, and the welcoming hurrah was cordial and joyous. Mrs. Frost was deeply touched and gratified, and Lord Ormersfield congratulated himself on having instigated Oliver to give this toast to Mr. Henderson. If Clara could have driven James from her

mind, she would have been delighted ; but there could be no triumph for her where he was excluded.

The Earl returned thanks on behalf of his aunt, and said a great deal that could have come from the mouth of no one 'unaccustomed to public speaking,' ending by proposing the health of 'Mr. Oliver Frost Dynevor.' In the midst of 'The Fine Old English Gentleman,' while Louis was suppressing a smile at the incongruity, a note was brought to him, which he tossed to Clara, purporting that he was to return thanks for her. She bent over the table to say, 'You will say nothing I cannot bear to hear,' folded her hands, and shut her eyes, as if she had been going to stand fire.

Oliver's clear, harsh tones, incapable of slowness or solemnity, began to return thanks for himself, and pronounce this to be the happy day to which he had been looking throughout his life—the day of restoring the family inheritance to his mother, and the child of his elder brother ; he faltered—he never could calmly speak of Henry. Failing the presence of one so dear, he rejoiced, however, to be able to introduce to them his only daughter, and he begged that his friends would drink the health of the heiress of Cheveleigh, Miss Dynevor.

Never did toast apparently conduce so little to the health of the subject. Unprepared as Clara was for such a declaration, it was to her as if she had been publicly denounced as the supplanter of her brother. She became deadly white, and sat bolt upright, stiff and motionless, barely stifling a scream, and her eyes fixed between command and entreaty on her cousin, without seeing, far less acknowledging, the bows levelled at her. Louis, alarmed by her looks, saw that no time was to be lost, and rising hastily before any one was ready, perilled his fame for eloquence, by rapidly assuring the gentlemen and ladies that Miss Dynevor was truly sensible of the kindness of their welcome, and the manner of receiving the toast. Then pushing back his chair, with 'never mind,' to Mrs. Smithers and her scent-bottle, he was at the back of Clara's chair almost before her confused eyes had missed him in her gasps for breath, and impulse to do something desperate ; and so she might, if his voice had not been in her ear, his hand grasping hers, both to console and raise her. 'Clara, come, take care.' She obeyed, but trembling so much that he was obliged to support her. Others would have risen in alarm, but he silenced them by signs, and entreaties that no one would frighten her grandmother. There was a large glass door standing open under the Gothic window, and through it he led her out upon a wide green lawn. She drew her breath in sobs, but could not speak. Louis asked her to untie her bonnet, and touched the string, which was merely a streamer. This brought a kind of laugh, but she unfastened the bonnet herself, and the first use she made of her breath was fiercely to exclaim—'How could you ! Why did you not tell them I never will—'

'Sit down,' said Louis, gently. 'Let me fetch some water.'

'No—no—let me get away from this place!' and she almost dragged him along, as fresh cheers and peals of music broke out, till they had entered a lonely walk in a sort of wilderness of shrubs. Still she hurried on, till they came out on a quiet little garden, where the tinkling of a little fountain was the only sound; the water looked clear and fresh with the gold-fish darting in it, and the sun shone calmly on the bright flowers and wavy ferns adorning the rockwork.

'What are you doing, Clara? You must rest here,' said he, drawing her down on a rustie bench, intended to represent a crocodile.

'I can't rest here! I must go home! I'm going home to Jem!' she exclaimed, obeying, however, because, though she could run, she could not stand.

'Dear Clara,' he said, affectionately, 'it was much worse than I expected. I never believed he could have committed himself to such an open declaration, especially without warning.'

'I'll not stay!' cried Clara, with all the vehemence of her Dynevour nature. 'I'll go straight home to Northwold to-morrow morning—to-night if I could. Yes, I will! I never came here for this!'

'And what is to become of my poor Aunt Kitty?'

'She has her Oliver! She would not have me put Jem out of his birthright.'

'James will not be put into it.'

She wrenched away her hand, and looked at him with all her brother's fierceness. 'And you!' she cried; 'why could not you speak up like a man, and tell them that I thank none of them, and will have nothing to say to any of them; and that if this is to belong to any one, it must be to my noble, my glorious, generous brother; and, if he hasn't it, it may go to the Queen, for what I care! I'll never have one stone of it. Why could you not say so, instead of all that humbug?'

'I thought the family had afforded quite spectacles enough for one day,' said Louis; 'and besides, I had some pity upon your grandmother, and on your uncle, too.'

'Jem told me grandmamma claimed my first duty; but he never knew of this wicked plan.'

'Yes, he did.'

'Knew that I was to supplant him!'

'Yes; we all knew it was a threat of your uncle; but we spared you the knowledge, thinking that all might yet be accommodated, and never expecting it would come on you in this sudden way.'

'Then I think I have been unfairly used,' cried Clara; 'I have been brought here on false pretences. As if I would have come near the place if I had known it!'

'A very false pretence that your grandmother must not be left alone at eighty, by the child whom she brought up.'

‘Oh, Louis! you want to tear me to pieces!’

‘I have pity on my aunt; I have far more pity on your uncle.’ Clara stared at him. ‘Here is a man who started with a grand heroic purpose to redeem the estate, not for himself, but for her and his brother; he exiles himself, he perseveres, till this one pursuit, for which he denies himself home, kindred, wife or child, absorbs and withers him up. He returns to find his brother dead; and the children, for whom he sacrificed all, set against him, and rejecting his favours.’

This was quite a new point of view to Clara. ‘It is his own fault,’ she said.

‘That a misfortune is by our own fault is no comfort,’ said Louis. ‘His apparent neglect, after all, arose from his absorption in the one object.’

‘Yes; but how shameful to wish James to forget his Ordination.’

‘A strong way of putting it. He asked too much; but he would have been, and may yet be, contented with concessions involving nothing wrong. His way of life can hardly have taught him to appreciate James’s scruples, as we do; and even if right and wrong were more neatly partitioned between them than I think they are, it would still be hard on him to find this destined heir spurning his benefits.’

‘What are you coming to, Louis? You think James right?’

‘I would give the world to think so, Clara. One motive is too high for praise, the other—no, I will say nothing of it. But I could wish I had not precipitated matters last year.’

‘What! would you have robbed us of our few happy months?’

‘It was your uncle whom I robbed; he would otherwise have come home like a good genius; but he found you all happy without him, and with no gratitude to spare for him. And there he sits at the head of that long melancholy table, trying to bring back days that have gone too far ever to be recalled, and only raising their spectres in this mocking finery; scarcely one man present whose welcome comes from his heart; his mother past the days of heeding the display, except for his sake; his nephew rejecting him; you indignant and miserable. Oh, Clara! I never saw more plainly money given for that which is not bread, and labour for that which satisfieth not. Empty and hollow as the pageant was, I could better bear to take my part in it, so far as truth would let me, than tell that poor man that the last of his brother’s children rejects him and his benefits.’

‘At this rate, you will make a hero of Uncle Oliver.’

‘It is because he is one of this world’s heroes that he is distasteful to you.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘Exclusive devotion to one object, grand though it was, has made him the man he appears to us. Think what the spirit must have been that conceived and carried out such a design!

Depend upon it there is a greatness in him, which may show, when, as dear granny says, she has cured him of all he learnt away from home. I think that must be the work for which you are all brought together here.'

'But I can't thrust out Jem. I won't stay here on those terms. I shall protest—'

'It is not graceful to make an uproar about your own magnanimity, nor to talk of what is to happen after a man's death. You don't come here to be heiress, but to take care of your grandmother. There is no need to disturb the future, unless, to be sure, you were obliged to explain your expectations.'

'Ah! to be sure, any way I could restore it all to James.'

'Or, better still, you may yet be able to draw the uncle and nephew together, and bring back peace and union.'

'Then I must stay and bear all this, you think?'

'As a mere matter of obedience, certainly.'

Clara's countenance fell.

'That may deprive it of the brilliance of a voluntary sacrifice; but, after all, it is what makes your course safe and plain.'

'And very dismal, just because no one will believe so.'

'So the safer for humility,' said Louis. 'Perhaps the dear old Terrace did not offer training and trial enough. I try to believe something of the kind in my own case. If choice had been mine, I should hardly have been exactly what I am; and you know how my chief happiness has been put far from me; but I can imagine that to be at the summit of my wishes might foster my sluggishness, and that I might rest too much on better judgment than my own, if it were beside me. Probation may be safer than joy; and you may do more good to yourself and others than even under Isabel's wing. Only think of the means in your hands, and all the wretched population round! There will be some hope of help for the curate now—besides, I shall know where to come for subscriptions next time I run crazy about any wonderful charity.'

Clara smiled. 'I suppose I must bear it,' she said.

'For shame, Clara! With Aunt Kitty, who would make a palace of a dungeon, in the glorious glow of such a sunset, turning each cloud to red and purple radiance by the very force of love and faith, who could regret the being beside her? My own dear and precious aunt, to see her so happy, with bliss and peace so undisturbed, so far above these toys, and these distresses, gives me a sort of fear—'

'Oh, don't, Louis—'

They were interrupted by approaching voices. Clara hastily started up, as her uncle and Lady Britton appeared in the green alley.

'Oh, must I go back to them all? My head *does* ache!'

Louis gave her his arm, pursued the path in the opposite direction, and emerged at the lower end of the bowling-green, with the battlemented front of the house rising before them.

Presently, he met his father searching for him. 'Poor Clara has been overcome,' he said, in explanation. 'The speechifying has been too much for her.'

It was the first time that Clara had appeared to the Earl in any light but that of an idle school-girl, and he said, kindly, 'It must have been very trying. There should have been more preparation. Your uncle would have shown better taste in sparing your grandmamma so obtrusive a reception, and I was much pained both for her and for you during some of the speeches.'

Sympathy from Lord Ormersfield nearly overthrew Clara again, and she involuntarily squeezed Louis's arm. He asked for his aunt, and was told, 'She is in the house, entertaining these people. They do not know when to go away. How could Oliver inflict such a party on her? and such a style of people!'

'I must go and help her,' said Louis.

Clara was in no condition to appear, but Louis caused Mrs. Beckett to be summoned, and committed her to her care. Her transport was one of the few pleasant things of that day. 'Oh, Miss Clara! Oh, my lord! Was there ever the like? Isn't Master Oliver the most blessed boy? Missus in her own home again! Eight men, and a French man-cook! If ever I thought to see the day! Her old room just as it was, only grander! Oh, if poor Mr. James was but here!'

'Ay, Jane, and here's Clara thinking herself ill about Mr. James. Take her up and give her some tea, and make her fit to behave prettily by and by, that granny may not be vexed.'

Having seen her safe under Jane's fondling care and infectious exultation, he betook himself to the drawing-room, relieved his aunt's anxiety by a whisper, and won golden opinions from the whole company, before they were fairly got rid of; and Oliver begged to conduct his mother to her apartment. 'Yes, my dear, I must go to poor little Clara.'

'I've no fears for Clara,' said Oliver, as he led her up-stairs. 'Knowing young fellow to wait for my announcement! I can give her near double what Ponsonby could. I'd not object—old Dynevor blood—'

'My poor Oliver, you have so learnt to think of money, that you can't believe others live for anything else. You'll learn your mistake.'

'You think the young chap meant nothing? I shall look sharp after him, then. I look on Clara as my own. I'll have no trifling.'

'You may save yourself the trouble,' said his mother. 'They understand each other—they have always been like brother and sister, and I cannot have the children teased, or things put into their heads.'

Oliver laughed his scornful chuckle, and said he did not understand that sort of brother and sister; but happily he became absorbed in showing his mother the fittings of her splendid bedroom.

Clara had the comfort of clinging round her grandmother's neck, and being told that it was all nonsense. Jem *should* have his rights, and Uncle Oliver would learn to love and honour him at last ; and she was a good child, and ought to have been prepared, if granny could have guessed he would do it so publicly and suddenly ; but she must forgive him, for he was beside himself at having got them home again, and he could not make enough of her because she was poor Henry's child. So she saw granny must not be grieved, and she let herself be dressed for a constrained dinner in the vast dining-room, where the servants outnumbered the diners, and the silver covers bore the Dynevor dragon as a handle, looking as spiteful as some of the race could do.

Oliver was obliged to conclude that no offer had passed between the two young people ; but on the way home next morning the Earl observed, 'Clara Frost has a fine figure, and is much improved by dress. She shows excellent feeling, and does credit to her education.'

'The Pendragon blood never had a finer development,' said Louis.

'Even supposing justice done to poor James, she will have a handsome portion. Oliver will have far more to dispose of than the five thousand pounds guaranteed to her.'

'Poor child !' said Louis.

'Yes, I pity her for being exposed to his parading. He forgot the gentleman in his merchant's office. If you should ever have any thoughts of rescuing her from him, my approval would not be wanting, and it would be the easiest way of restoring her brother.'

'My dear father, if Clara and I were always sister and brother when she was poor, we certainly shall be no more now.'

Lord Ormersfield mentally execrated Mr. Ponsonby, and felt that he had spoken too soon.

Jane's felicity was complete when, a few days after, she received, addressed in Lord Fitzjocelyn's handwriting, an *Illustrated News*, with a whole page containing 'the reception of Mrs. Dynevor of Cheveleigh,' with grand portraits of all the flounces and veils, many gratuitous moustaches, something passing for Oliver standing up with a wine-glass in his hand, a puppy that would have perfectly justified Mr. Ponsonby's aversion representing Lord Fitzjocelyn, and no gaps at the banquet-table.

That picture Mrs. Beckett caused to be framed and glazed, kept it as her treasure for life, and put it into her will as a legacy to Charlotte Arnold.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE GIANT OF THE WESTERN STAR

Come, let us range the subterranean vast,
Dark catacombs of ages, twilight dells,
And footmarks of the centuries long past,
Which look on us from their sepulchral cells.

Then glad emerge we to the cheering day,
Some sun-ranged height, or Alpine snowy crown,
Or Chimborazo towering far away
O'er the great Andes chain, and, looking down,
On flaming Cordilleras, mountain thrown
O'er mountain, vast new realms.

The Creation.—REV. I. WILLIAMS

THE same impression of the *Illustrated London News* which delighted Jane Beckett's simple heart in England, caused no small sensation at Lima.

La Señora Ponsonby cast one glance at *El Visconde* there portrayed, and then became absorbed in Clara's bonnet; Mr. Robson pronounced Lord Ormersfield as good a likeness as Mr. Dynevov; Mr. Ponsonby cast a scornful look and smile at the unlucky figure representing Fitzjocelyn; and not a critical voice was heard, excepting Tom Madison's, who indignantly declared that they had made the young lord look as if he had stood behind a counter all his life.

The juxtaposition of Lord Fitzjocelyn and Mr. Dynevov's niece was not by any means forgotten. It looked very like a graceful conclusion to Oliver's exertions that he should crown their union; and the county paper, which had likewise been forwarded, very nearly hinted as much. Mr. Ponsonby took care that the paragraph should be laid in his daughter's way, and he offered her the sight of Oliver Dynevov's own letter.

Mary suspected that he regarded it as something conclusive, and took care to read it when there were no eyes to mark her emotions. 'Ormersfield and his son were there,' wrote Oliver. 'The young man is not so soft as he looks. They tell me he is going to work sensibly at the estate, and he has a sharp eye for the main chance. I hear he played fast and loose till he found your daughter had better prospects than Miss Conway, whom my fool of a nephew chose to marry, and now he is making up to my niece. My mother dotes on him, and I shall make no objection—no extravagance that I can see, and he will take care of the property. You will take no offence, since you refuse the tender altogether.'

Of this Mary believed two sentences—namely, that Aunt Catharine doted on Fitzjocelyn, and that he was not so soft as he looked, which she took as an admission that he was not comporting himself foolishly. She was quite aware that the friendship between him and Clara might deceive an uninitiated spectator; and, though she commanded herself to think that an

attachment between them would be equally natural and desirable, she could not but look with great satisfaction at the easy, unsuspecting tone of Mrs. Frost's letter, which, after mentioning with much affection and gratitude all Oliver's attempts to make her happy, in spite of the many sad changes around, ended by saying that poor Clara felt the separation from her brother so much, that without dear Louis she did not know how she would have gone through the festivities. 'You can guess how he is everything to us all,' said Aunt Kitty, 'and I brightened up his looks with giving him your last letter to read. I dare say, Miss Mary, you would like to scold me.'

Aunt Kitty! Aunt Kitty! you dearly loved a little kindly mischief! Let that be as it might, Mr. Ponsonby thought that Mr. Dynevor's letter had certainly not had much effect, for Mary was more lively and cheerful than he had seen her since her first arrival.

Mary's cheerfulness was becoming the more necessary to him, since he was beginning a little to weary of the childish charms of his young Limenian wife. Rosita had neither education nor conversation; and when all her pretty ways had been tried on him in succession, they began to grow tedious. Moreover, the playful submission which she had brought from her convent was beginning to turn into wilfulness. Her extravagances in dress were appalling. She refused to wear the same dresses twice; and cried, stamped her graceful foot, and pouted when he remonstrated. She managed to spend every evening in amusement, either at the Opera, or at evening parties, where her splendid eyes, and scraps of broken English, made great havoc among young lieutenants and midshipmen visiting Lima. Mr. Ponsonby was growing tired of these constant gaieties, and generally remained at home, sending Mary in his stead, as a sort of guard over her; and Mary, always the same in her white muslin, followed Rosita through all the salas of Lima—listened to the confidences of Limenian beauties—talked of England to little naval cadets, more home-sick than they would have chosen to avow—and felt sure of some pleasure and interest for the evening, when Mr. Ward came to stand by her chair.

One afternoon, as Mary sat in her window reading, a gay voice exclaimed, '*Beso las manos a Usted;*' and looking up, she saw one of the prettiest figures imaginable. A full dark purple satin skirt just revealed the point of a dainty white satin shoe. It was plaited low on the hips, and girded loosely with a brightly striped scarf. The head and upper part of the person were shrouded in a close hood of elastic black silk webbing, fastened behind at the waist, and held over the face by the hand, which just allowed one be-ringed finger and one glancing dark eye to appear, while the other hand held a fan and a laced pocket-handkerchief. So perfectly did the costume suit the air and shape of the lady, that, as she stood among Mary's orange-trees, it was like an illusion of the fancy; but conster-

nation took away all the charm from Mary's eyes. 'Tapada,' she cried; 'you surely are not going out, *tapada*!'

'Ah, you have found me out,' cried Rosita. 'Yes, indeed I am; and I have the like *saya y manto* ready for you. Come, we will be on the Alameda; Xavier waits to attend us. Your Señor Ouard will be at his evening walk.'

But Mary drew back. This pretty disguise was a freak, such as only the most gay ladies permitted themselves; and she had little doubt that her father would be extremely displeased at his wife and daughter so appearing, although danger there was none; since, though any one might accost a female thus veiled, not the slightest impertinence was ever allowed. Mary implored Rosita to wait till Mr. Ponsonby's views should be known; but she was only laughed at for her English precision, and the pretty creature danced away to her stolen pleasure.

She came in, all glory and delight at the perplexity in which she had involved the English officers, the guesses and courtesies of her own countrymen, and her mystification of Mr. Robson, who had evidently recognized her, though pretending to treat her as a charming stranger.

The triumph was of short duration. For the first time, she had aroused one of Mr. Ponsonby's gusts of passion; she quailed under it, wept bitterly, and made innumerable promises; and then she put on her black mantilla, and, with Xavier behind her, went to her convent chapel, and returned, half crying over the amount of repetitions of her rosary by which her penance was to be performed, and thereby all sense of the fault put away. Responsibility and reflection never seemed to be impressed on that childish mind.

Mary had come in for some of the anger, for not having prevented Rosita's expedition; but they were both speedily forgiven, and Mary never was informed again of her using the *saya y manto*.

Their minds were diverted by the eager desire of one of the young officers to visit the silver mines. It had been an old promise to Mary from her father to take her to see them; but in her former residence in Peru, it had never been fulfilled. He now wished to inspect matters himself, in order to answer the numerous questions sent by Oliver; and Rosita eagerly catching at any proposal which promised a variety, a party was made up for ascending to the San Benito mines, some days' journey from Lima. Mary and Rosita were the only ladies; but there were several gentlemen, three naval officers, and Mr. Ward, who was delighted to have an opportunity of visiting the wonders which had been, for many years, within his reach without his rousing himself from his business to see them. Tents, bedding, and provisions were to be carried with them, and Mary had full occupation in stimulating Dolores to bring together the requisite preparations; while Mr. Ward and Robson collected guides, muleteers, and litters.

It was a merry party, seated on the gaily-trapped mules, with an idle young midshipman to make mischief, and all in spirits to enjoy his nonsense, in the exhilaration of the mountain air blowing freshly from the snowy summits which seemed to rise like walls before them. The steaming, misty, relaxing atmosphere of Lima was left behind, and with it many a care and vexation. Mr. Ponsonby brought his mule to the side of his wife's litter, and exchanged many a joke in Anglo-Spanish with her and the lieutenant; and Mr. Ward, his brow unfurrowed from counting-house cares, walked beside Mary's mule, gathered each new flower for her, and listened to her narrative of *some* of the causes for which she was glad, with her own eyes, to see Tom Madison in his scene of action.

The first day of adventure they slept at a hacienda, surrounded with fields where numerous llamas were pasturing. The next began the real mountain work; the rock looked like a wall before them, and the white summits were sharply defined against the blue sky. The sharper air made Rosita shiver; but the English travellers congratulated themselves on something like a breeze, consoling them for the glow with which the sunbeams beat upon the rocks. The palms and huge ferns had given place to pines, and these were growing more scanty. Once or twice they met a brown Indian, robed in a coloured blanket, with a huge straw hat, from beneath which he gazed with curious, though gentle eyes, upon the cavalcade. By and by, looking like a string of ants descending a perpendicular wall, Mary beheld a row of black specks slowly moving. She was told that these were the mules bringing down the metal in panniers—the only means of communication, until, as the lieutenant promised, a perpendicular railway should be invented. The electricity of the atmosphere made jokes easily pass current. The mountain was 'only' one of the spurs of the Andes, a mere infant among the giants; but, had it been set down in Europe, Mont Blanc must have hidden his diminished head; and the view was better than on some of the more enormous neighbours, which were both further inland, and of such height, that to gaze from them was 'like looking from an air-balloon into vacancy.' Whereas here Mary had but to turn her head, as her mule steadily crept round the causeway—a legacy of the Incas—to behold the expanse of the Pacific, a sheet of glittering light in the sunshine, the horizon line raised so high, that the first moment it gave her a sense of there being something wrong with her eye, before the feeling of infinity rushed upon her.

They were turning the flank of the mountain, and losing the sunshine. The evening air was almost chill, and the clearness such that they already saw the ragged height whither they were bound rising in craggy shattered grandeur, every flat space or gentler declivity covered with sheds and huts for the work-people, and cavernous mouths opening on the cliff-side. Dark figures could be distinctly seen moving about; and as to the

descending mules, they seemed to be close on the other side of a narrow ravine. Rosita, who, now it came to the point, was not without fears of sleeping on the bare mountain-side, wanted to push on ; she was sure they could arrive before night, but she was told that she knew nothing of mountain atmosphere ; and she was not discontented with the bright fire and comfortable arrangements on which they suddenly came, after turning round a great shoulder of rock. Mr. Robson and the sumpter-mules had quietly preceded them, and the gipsying on the Andes was likely to be not much less luxurious than an English picnic. The negro cook had done his best ; Mary made her father's coffee, and Rosita was waited on to her satisfaction. And when darkness came on, too early for English associations with warm days, the lights of the village at the mine glittered merrily, and, apparently, close at hand ; and the stars above shone as Mary had never seen them, so marvellously large and bright, and the Magellan clouds so white and mysterious. Mr. Ward came and told her some of the observations made on them by distinguished travellers ; and after an earnest conversation, she sought her matted bed, with a pleasant feeling on her mind, as if she had been unusually near Louis's world.

Clear, sharp, and cold was the air next day ; the snow-fields glistened gloriously in the rising sun, and a rose-coloured mist seemed to rise from them. Rosita was shown the unusual spectacle of hoar frost, and shiveringly profited by Mary's ample provision of wraps. The hill-sides were beyond conception desolate and bare. Birds were an almost unknown race in Peru ; and here even green things had departed, scarcely a tuft of blossom looking out on the face of the red and purple rock ; and the exceeding stillness so awful, that even the boy-sailor scarce dared to speak above his breath. Rosita began to repent of having come near so horrible a place ; and when she put her head out of her litter, and beheld herself winding along a ledge projecting from the face of a sheer precipice, she would have begged to go back instantly ; but her husband spoke in a voice of authority which subdued her ; she drew in her head into her basket-work contrivance, and had recourse to vows to Sta Rosa of Lima of a chaplet of diamond roses, if she ever came safely down again.

Mary had made up her mind that they should not have been taken thither if there were any real danger ; and so, though she could have preferred her mule taking the inner side of the ledge, and was not too happy when it climbed like a cat, she smiled, and answered all inquiries that she did not think she ought to be frightened. The region was in general more stern than beautiful, the clefts between the hills looking so deep, that it seemed as if an overthrown mountain could hardly fill them ; but now and then came sudden peeps of that wonderful ocean ; or almost under her feet, as if she could throw a stone into it, there would lie an intensely green valley, shut in with feathering

pinces, and the hacienda and grazing llamas dwindled, so that they could have been taken for a Swiss farm and flocks of sheep.

Not till the middle of the day did they meet the line of mules, and not until the sunset did they find themselves close before the wonderful perforated San Benito summit. It was, unlike many other metalliferous hills, an isolated, sharply-defined mass of rock, breaking into sudden pinnacles and points, traversed with veins of silver. These veins had been worked with galleries, which, even before the Spanish conquest, had honeycombed the solid rock, and had been thought to have exhausted its riches ; but it had been part of Oliver Dynevor's bold speculations to bring modern science to profit by the leavings of the Peruvians and their destroyers. It was a marvellous work, but it might still be a question whether the profit would bear out the expense.

However, that was not the present consideration. No one could feel anything but admiring astonishment at the fantastic craggy height of peaks and spires, rising against the darkening sky, like the very stronghold of the Giant of the Western Star ; and, with the black openings of the galleries, here and there showing the lights of the workmen within. Mary remembered the tales, in which Louis used vainly to try to interest her, of metal-working Dwarfs within the mountains ; and would have been glad to tell him that, after all, reality was quite as strange as his legends.

The miners, Indians and negroes, might truly have been Trollds, as, with their brown and black countenances, and wild bright attire, they came thronging out of their rude houses, built of piled stones on every tolerably level spot. Three or four stout, hearty Cornish miners, with picks on their shoulders, made the contrast stranger ; and among them stood a young man, whose ruddy open face carried Mary home to Ormersfield in one moment ; and she could not but blush almost as if it had been Louis, when she bent her head in acknowledgment of his bow.

He started towards her as if to help her off her mule ; but Mr. Ponsonby was detaining him by questions, and Mr. Ward, as usual, was at her rein. In a wonderfully brief time, as it seemed to her, all the animals were led off to their quarters ; and Robson, coming up, explained that Madison's hut, the only habitable place, had been prepared for the ladies—the gentlemen must be content to sleep in their tent.

'The hut was at least clean,' said Robson, as he ushered them in ; and Mary felt as if it were a great deal more. It was rudely built, and only the part near the hearth was lined with matting ; the table and the few stools and chairs were rough carpentry, chiefly made out of boxes ; but upon the wall hung a beautiful print from Raffaele, of which she knew the giver as surely as if his name had been written on it ; and the small bookcase suspended near contained, compressed together, an

epitome of Louis's tastes—the choicest of all his favourites, in each class of book. Mary stood by it, reading the names, and trying to perceive Louis's principle of selection in each case. It jarred upon her when, as the gentlemen loitered about, waiting for the evening meal, they came and looked at the titles, with careless remarks that the superintendent was a youth of taste ; and a laugh at the odd medley—Spenser, Shakspeare, 'Don Quixote,' Calderon, Fouqué, and selections from Jeremy Taylor, &c.

Mary would hear no more comments. She went to the fire, and tried to persuade Rosita they would come safe down again ; and then, on the apology for a mantelsheff, she saw some fossils and some dried grasses, looking almost as if Fitzjocelyn had put them there.

She did not see Madison that night ; but the next morning he presented himself to act as their guide through the wonders of the extraordinary region where his lot had been cast. She found that this was only the first floor of the wondrous castle. Above and above, rose galleries, whence the ore was lowered down to the buildings here placed, where it underwent the first process of separation. The paths above were fit for none, save a chamois, or a barefooted Indian, or a sailor—for the midshipman was climbing aloft in such places, that Tom's chief work was to summon him back, in horror lest he should involve himself in endless galleries, excavated before the days of Atahualpa.

Much of the desperate scrambling which Madison recommended as plain sailing, was beyond Mr. Ponsonby ; but where he went, Mary went ; and when he stopped, she, though she had not drawn since the master at her school had resigned her as a hopeless case, applied herself to the perpetration of an outline of the rocks, that, as she said, 'her aunts might see what sort of place it was.' Her steady head, and firm, enterprising hand and foot, enabled her to see the crowning wonder of the mountain, one of the *ventanillas* or windows. Mr. Ward, having visited it, came back bent on taking her thither ; there was no danger, if she were not afraid. So between him and Tom Madison, she was dragged up a steep path, and conducted into a gallery cut out in the living rock, growing gloomier and gloomier, till suddenly there was a spot of light on the sparkling floor, and Mary found herself beneath an opening through the mountain crown, right up into the sky, which, through the wild opening, looked of the deepest, most ultra-marine, almost purple blue, utterly beyond conception in the glory of intense colour, bringing only to her mind those most expressive, yet most inexpressive words, 'the body of heaven in His clearness.' She felt, what she had often heard said, that to all mountain-tops is given somewhat of the glory that dwelt on Sinai. That ineffable blue was more dazzling than even the fields beyond fields of marvellous white that met her eye on emerging from the dark gallery.

'I never wish so much that Lord Fitzjocelyn should see anything as that,' said Tom Madison, when Mary, in her gratitude, was trying to say something adequate to the trouble she had given, though the beauty was beyond any word of admiration.

'He would—' she began to answer, but the rest died away, only answered by Tom with an emphatic '*He would!*' and then began the difficulties of getting down.

But Mary had the pleasure at the next pause of hearing Mr. Ward say, 'That is a very fine intelligent young fellow, worthy of his library. I think your father has a prize in him!'

Mary's eyes thanked Mr. Ward, with all her heart in them. It was worth going up the Andes for such a sentence to put into a letter that Aunt Kitty would show to Louis.

Robson seemed anxious to monopolize the attention of the gentlemen, to the exclusion of Madison; and while Tom was thus thrust aside, Mary succeeded in having a conversation with him, such as she felt was a sort of duty to Louis. She asked him the names of the various mountain-peaks in sight, whose bare crags, too steep to support the snow, here and there stood out dark in salient contrast to the white scenery; and as he gave them to her, mentioning the few facts that he had been able to gather respecting them, she was able to ask him whether he was in the habit of seeing anything approaching to society. He smiled, saying that his nearest neighbours were many miles off—an engineer conducting some far more extensive mining operations, whom he sometimes met on business, and an old Spanish gentleman, who lived in a valley far down the mountain side, with whom he sometimes smoked his cigar on a Sunday, if he felt inclined for a perpendicular promenade on a Peruvian causeway for nearly four miles. Mary asked whether he often did feel inclined. No, he thought not often; he had generally worked hard enough in the week to make his book the best company; but he liked now and then to see something green for a change after these bare mountains and rocks, and the old Don Manrique was very civil and agreeable. Then, after a few minutes' conversation of this kind, something of the old conscious abruptness of tone seemed to come over the young man, and looking down, he said bluntly, 'Miss Ponsonby, do you think there would be any objection to my coming into Lima just for Christmas?'

'I suppose not; I cannot tell.'

Tom explained that all the miners would be making holiday, and the senior Cornishman might safely be left in charge of the works, while he only wished to spend Christmas-day itself in the city, and would be a very short time absent. He blushed a little as he spoke, and Mary ventured to reply to what she gathered of his thought, 'No other day would suit you as well?'

'No, ma'am, it hardly would,' he answered, gravely.

'I will try what can be done,' said Mary, 'unless you would speak to Mr. Ponsonby yourself.'

He looked inquiringly at Mr. Ponsonby's figure some paces distant, and shook his head.

'I will try,' repeated Mary; and then she added, 'These grand hill-tops and blue sky almost make a church—'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Tom, his black eyes lighting at the thought; 'I've felt so sometimes, but 'tis a mighty lonely one after a time. I've taken my book, and got out of earshot of the noise the blacks make; and I do assure you, Miss Ponsonby, the stillness was enough to drive one wild, with nothing but savage rocks to look at either! Not a green plant, nor a voice to answer, unless one got to the mountain echoes, and they are worse—'

'But surely you have the Cornishmen! What do they do on a Sunday?'

'They lie about, and smoke and sleep, or go down to the valley,' said Tom. 'I never thought of them.'

'I think you should,' said Mary, gravely. 'If you are in any authority over them, it must give you a charge over their souls. I think you should, at least, give them the choice of reading the service with you.'

'I'll think about it,' said Madison, gruffly.

'I will send up some books for them to make an opening,' said Mary. 'I should not like to think of men living in such scenes, without being the better for them.'

Robson was here obliged to call Madison to refer some question to him; but Mary had another talk with him, when he begged to know if there were likely soon to be an opportunity of sending to England. He had some fossils which he wished to send to Lord Fitzjocelyn; and he fetched them, and explained his theories with regard to them as if he had almost forgotten that she was not his young lord.

She carried his request to her father, and was answered that of course he might take a holiday if he could leave the works with safety; he had better spend a few days in the town when he did come. With this answer she made him happy; and they set off, to the extreme joy of Rosita, who had engrossed much less attention than she had expected, and declared she would never have come into these horrible places if she could have imagined what they were like. Certainly, no one wished to have her company there again.

When Mr. Ponsonby mentioned the permission which he had accorded to Madison, Robson coughed and looked annoyed. Mary could not help suspecting that this was because the request had not been preferred through himself. 'So the young fellow wants to be coming down, does he? I thought his ardour was too hot to last long.'

'Very natural that the poor lad should want a holiday,' said Mr. Ponsonby. 'It must take a tolerable flow of spirits to stand long, being so many feet above the level of the sea, in caves fit for a robber's den at the theatre.'

'Oh, I am making no objection, sir,' returned Robson; 'the

young man may take his pleasure for what I care, so he can be trusted not to neglect his business.'

Here the path narrowed, and Mary had to fall back out of hearing; but she had an unpleasant suspicion that Robson was telling her father something to Tom's disadvantage, and she had to consider how to avoid rousing a jealousy, which she knew might be dangerous.

Mr. Ward, however, came up to interrupt her thoughts and watch the steps of her mule. The worst difficulties of the descent had precluded all conversation; and the party were just beginning to breathe freely, think of *terra firma* as not far off, and gaze with easier minds on the marvellous ocean. Mary went on in very comfortable discussion of the wonders they had seen, and of Madison's remark that the performances of the Incas made one quite ashamed of the achievements of modern science—a saying in which Mr. Ward perfectly agreed; and then he began to say something rather long, and a little disconnected, and Mary's mind took an excursion to Aunt Kitty, and the reading of the letter that she was going to write, when suddenly something in Mr. Ward's voice startled her, and recalling her attention, she discovered, to her dismay, that he was actually making her an offer! An offer! She would as soon have expected one from her father! And oh! how well expressed—how entirely what it ought to be! How unlike every one of those three of her past experience!

In great distress she exclaimed, 'Oh, Mr. Ward, pray do not—indeed, I cannot!'

'I feared that I was but too likely to meet with such an answer,' said Mr. Ward; 'and yet your father encouraged me to hope, that in course of time—'

'Then papa has told you what he thinks?' said Mary.

'I applied to him before I could venture to join this party. Mary, I am aware that I can bring none of the advantages which have'—his voice faltered—'which have forestalled me; but the most true and earnest affection is already yours.'

'I am very sorry for it, Mr. Ward,' said Mary, gravely, though much touched. 'It is very kind of you, but it is only fair and candid to tell you that papa has probably led you into a mistake. He thinks that the—the object was weak and unworthy, and that my feelings could be easily overcome. He does not know—'

'He assured me that all was at an end—'

'It is,' said Mary; 'but I am certain that I shall never feel for any one else the same as'—and the tears were coming fast. 'You are very kind, Mr. Ward, but it is of no use to think that this can ever be.'

'Forgive me for having harassed you,' said Mr. Ward, and they went on so long in silence that Mary hoped it was over, and yet he did not go away from her. She was sorry to see the grieved, dejected expression on his good, sensible, though some-

what worn countenance; and she esteemed him highly; but who could have thought of so unlucky a fancy coming into his head? When, at length, he spoke again, it was to say that he begged that she would forget what was past, and allow him to continue on his former footing. Mary was glad to have something grateful to say, and answered that she should have been very sorry to lose him as a friend; whereupon his face cheered up, he thanked her, and fell back from her rein. In spite of her past trials of the futility of the attempt to live with a rejected suitor as if nothing had happened, she had hopes of the possibility when her own heart was untouched, and the gentleman nearly doubled her years; but when she talked to her father, she gathered that it was considered by both gentlemen that the proposal had been premature, and that her final detachment from Louis was reckoned on as so certain that Mr. Ward was willing to wait, as if it were only a matter of time. He was so wealthy and prosperous, and a connection with him would have been so useful to the firm, that Mary was grateful to her father for forbearing to press her on what he evidently wished so earnestly. Mr. Ward had exactly the excellent, well-balanced character which seemed made to suit her, and she could have imagined being very happy with him, if— No, no—Mr. Ward could not be thought of at the same moment.

Yet, whatever she might say, no one would believe her; so she held her peace, and wrote her history of the silver mines; and Mr. Ward haunted the house, and was most kindly forbearing and patient, and Mary found at every turn how good a man he was, and how cruel and mistaken his sister thought her.

And Christmas came, when the churches were perfect orange-groves, and the scene of the wanderers of Bethlehem was acted from house to house in the twilight. The scanty English congregation met in the room that served as a chapel in the Consul's house—poor Mary alone of all her household there to keep the feast; and Mr. Ward was there, and Madison had come down from his mountain. There were hearts at home that would rejoice to hear that.

Mary saw him afterwards, and he thanked her for her suggestion respecting the miners. Two had been only as shy as Tom himself; they had been reading alone, and were glad to join company; a third was beginning to come, and it had led to a more friendly intercourse. Mary sent him away, very happy with some books for them, some new Spanish reading for himself, an astronomical book, and her little celestial globe—for the whole firmament of stars had been by no means lost on him. That interview was her Christmas treat. Well for her that she did not hear Robson say, 'That young man knows how to come over the ladies. I shall keep a sharper look-out after him. I know no harm of him, but if there's one man I trust less than another, it is one that tries the serious dodge.'

CHAPTER XXXII

THE WRONG WOMAN IN THE WRONG PLACE

Give me again my hollow tree,
My crust of bread, and liberty.

The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse.—POPE

THE new cook's first compliment to Charlotte was, 'Upon my word, you are a genteel young woman; I dare say you have a lot of sweethearts.'

The indignant denial of the Lady of Eschalott was construed into her being 'sly,' and Mrs. Cook promised herself to find her out.

Those were not happy days with the little maiden. The nurse looked down on her, and the cook filled the kitchen with idlers, whose looks and speeches were abhorrent to her. Sometimes the woman took offence at her for being high; at others, she forced on her advice upon her dress, or tried to draw out confidences either on lovers or the affairs of the family. Charlotte was sadly forlorn, and shut herself up in her pantry, or in her own little attic with Jane's verbenas which cook had banished from the kitchen, and lost her sorrows in books hired at the library. She read, and dreamt, created leisure for reading, lived in a trance, and awoke from it to see her work neglected, reproach herself, and strain her powers to make up for what was left undone. Then, finding her efforts failing, she would be distressed and melancholy, until a fresh novel engrossed her for a time, and the whole scene was enacted over again.

Still, it was not all idleness nor lost ground. The sense of responsibility was doing her good; she withstood the cook's follies, and magnanimously returned unopened a shining envelope of Mr. Delaford's. At Christmas, when Mr. and Mrs. Frost went to pay a visit at Beauchastel, and the cook enjoyed a course of gaieties, the only use she made of her liberty was to drink tea once with Mrs. Martha, and to walk over to Mark-edge to see old Madison, who was fast breaking, and who dictated to her his last messages to his grandson.

James and Isabel spent a pleasant, lively Christmas with their hospitable old friends, and James returned full of fresh vigour and new projects. His first was to offer his assistance to the Vicar, so as to have a third service on the Sunday; but there were differences of opinion between them, and his proposal was received so ungraciously, that a coolness arose, which cut him off from any openings for usefulness.

However, he had enough to occupy him in his own department, the school. He was astonished at his boys' deficiency in religious instruction, and started a plan for collecting them for some teaching for an hour before morning service. Mr. Calcott

agreed with him that nothing could be more desirable, but doubted whether the parents would compel their sons to attend, and advised James to count the cost, doubting whether, in the long run, he would be able to dispense with one day of entire rest. This was the more to be considered, since James expended a wonderful amount of energy in his teaching, did his utmost to force the boys on, in class and in private, drilled his usher, joined in the games, and gave evening lectures on subjects of general information.

Some responded to his training, and these he strenuously encouraged, asking them to dinner, and taking them to walk ; and these were enthusiastically fond of him, and regarded his beautiful wife as a being of a superior order. Fitzjocelyn and James used to agree that intercourse with her was a very important element in their training, and the invitations were made as impartial as possible, including the intelligent and well-conducted, irrespective of station. Isabel's favourite guest was a good, well-mannered lad, son to Mr. Ramsbotham's follower, the butcher ; but, unluckily, Mrs. Richardson and her friends did not esteem it a compliment when their sons were asked to meet him ; and, on the other hand, James did not always distinguish real merit from mere responsiveness to his own mind. Dull boys, or such as had a half-sullen, half-conservative dislike to change, did not gain notice of an agreeable kind ; and while intending to show strict justice, he did not know how far he was affected by his prepossessions.

His lectures had emancipated him from evening parties ; and, after Mrs. Frost's departure, visiting gave Isabel little trouble. The calm, lofty manners that had been admired in Miss Conway, were thought pride in Mrs. James Frost ; and none of the ladies of Northwold even wished to do more than exchange morning calls with her, and talk among themselves of her fine-ladyism. She recked nothing of their keeping aloof ; her book and her pen were far pleasanter companions on her alternate evenings of solitude, and in them she tried to lose her wishes for the merry days spent with granny and Clara, and her occasional perceptions that all was not as in their time. James would sometimes bring this fact more palpably before her.

The separation of the families had not diminished the income of the household, but the difference in comfort was great. Isabel knew nothing of management, and did not care to learn. She had been willing to live on a small scale, but she did not understand personal superintendence ; she was careless of display, and perfectly happy as long as she was the guest of the grandmother, but she had no comprehension of petty tidinesses or small economies. Now James, brought up on a very different scale, knew in detail how the household ought to live, and made it a duty not to exceed a fixed sum. He had the eye for neatness that she wanted ; he could not believe it a hardship to go without indulgences to which his grandmother and sister

had not been accustomed. Thus, he protested against unnecessary fires; Isabel shivered and wore shawls; he was hurt at seeming to misuse her, resigned his study fire, and still found the coals ever requiring to be renewed, insisted that his wife should speak to the cook, and mystified her by talking about the regulation of the draught of the kitchen fire; and when Isabel understood, she forgot the lecture.

He was a devoted and admiring husband, but he could not coolly discover innumerable petty neglects and wasteful habits. Impatient words broke out, and Isabel always received them so meekly that he repented and apologized; and in the reconciliation the subject was forgotten, but only to be revived another time. Isabel was always ready to give warm aid and sympathy in all his higher cares and purposes, and her mild tranquillity was repose and soothing to him, but she was like one in a dream. She had married a vision of perfection, and entered on a romance of happy poverty, and she had no desire to awaken; so she never exerted her mind upon the world around her, when it seemed oppressive; and kept the visionary James Frost before her, in company with Adeline and the transformed Sir Hubert. It was much easier to line his tent with a tapestry of Maltese crosses, than to consider whether the hall should be covered with cocoa-nut matting.

How Christmas passed with Clara, may be seen in the following letter:—

‘Cheveleigh, Jan. 1851.

‘DEAREST JEM,—I can write a long letter to-night, for a fortunate cold has spared me from one of Sir Andrew’s dinner-parties. It is a reminiscence of the last ball, partly brought on by compunction at having dragged poor granny thither, in consideration of my unguarded declaration of intense dislike to being chaperoned by Lady Britton. Granny looks glorious in black velvet and diamonds, and I do trust that her universal goodwill rendered the ball more tolerable to her than it was to me. She, at least, is all she seems; whereas I am so infested with civilities, that I long to proclaim myself little Clara Frost, bred up for a governess, and the laughing-stock of her school. Oh! for that first ball where no one danced with me but Mr. Richardson, and I was not a mere peg for the display of Uncle Oliver’s Peruvian jewels! I have all the trouble in the world to be allowed to go about fit to be seen, and only by means of great fighting and coaxing did I prevail to have my dress only from London instead of Paris.

‘And no wonder I shivered all the way to the ball. Fancy Jane insisting on my going to display my dress to that poor dying Marianne; I was shocked at the notion of carrying my frivolities into such a scene, but Jane said her mind ran on it, and it was “anything to take off her thoughts from that man.” So I went into her room, and oh! if you could have seen the poor thing, with her short breath and racking cough, her cheeks

burning and her eyes glistening at that flimsy trumpery. One bunch of the silver flowers on my skirt was wrong ; she spied it, and they would not thwart her, so she would have the needle, and the skeleton trembling fingers set them right. They said she would sleep the easier for it, and she thanked me as if it had really set her more at rest ; but how sad, how strange it seems, when she knows that she is sinking fast, and has had Mr. Danvers with her every day. He thinks all is well with her ; but it was a melancholy, blank, untaught mind, to begin to work on. Louis would call her life a mournful picture of our civilization. She has told it all to Jane : she was of the mechanic class, just above the rank that goes to Sunday-schools ; she went to a genteel weekly school, and was taken out pleasuring on Sunday—no ground-work at all. An orphan at fifteen, she never again knew tenderness. Then came dress-making till her health failed, and she tried service. She says, Isabel's soft tones made a paradise for her ; but late hours, which she did not feel at the time, wore her out, and Delaford trifled with her. Always when alone he pretended devotion to her, then flirted with any other who came in his way ; and worry and fretting put the finish to her failing health. She had no spirit to break entirely with him, and even now is pining for one kind word, which he seems to be too hard and selfish to send to her, in answer to a letter of forgiveness that she wrote a fortnight back. What a wretch he must be ! Jane says, he tried flirting with poor little Charlotte, and that she was a little "took up" with his guitar and his verses ; but then, Jane says, "Charlotte has somewhat at the bottom, and knows better than to heed a man as wasn't real religious." I suppose that is the true difference between Charlotte and Marianne ; and even if we looked into Delaford's history, most likely we should find him another nineteenth-century victim to an artificial life. At least, I trust that Jane has been the greatest blessing ; Marianne herself speaks of her as more than a mother to her ; and I believe I told you of the poor girl's overpowering gratitude, when she found we would not turn her out to die homeless. We read, and we talk, and Mr. Danvers comes ; but I believe dear old Jane does more for her than all.

'Poor Jane ! when her task of nursing is over, I do not know what she will turn to. The grand servants only keep terms with her because Uncle Oliver gave notice that no one should stay in the house who did not show respect to his *friend* Mrs. Beckett. It takes all her love for Missus and Master Oliver to make her bear it ; and her chief solace is in putting me to bed, and in airing Master Oliver's shirt and slippers. You would laugh to hear her compassionating the home minced-pies ! and she tells me she would give fifty pounds rather than bring Charlotte here. My uncle wished grandmamma to manage the house, and she did so at first ; but she and the servants did not get on well together : and she said, what I never knew her say

before, that she is too old, and so we have an awful dame who rules with a high hand.

'You ask whether the dear granny is happy. You know she is all elasticity, and things are pleasanter here to her than to me ; but I do not think she enjoys life as she did at home. It is hard to have her whole mission reduced to airing those four horses. We have tormented my uncle out of making us use more than two at a time, by begging for six and the Lord Mayor's coach ; but aired alternately they *must* be, and we must do it, and by no road but what the coachman chooses ; and this does not seem to me to agree with her like trotting about the town on her errands. There is no walking here, excepting in the pleasure-ground, where all my grandfather's landscape-gardening has been cut up so as to be a mere vexation to her. The people round are said to be savage and disaffected, and the quarter of a mile between the park and the village is subject to miners going home. They did once holloa at me, and orders were issued that I should walk no more. I believe that if they saw me fearless, and coming among them for friendly purposes, they would leave off hooting ; but the notion frightens granny, so I am a prisoner. They are the people to think it a mockery to be visited by a lady bedizened as I am, and stuck up in a carriage ; so we can do very little except through Mr. Danvers, and my uncle is always discontented at the sight of him, and fancies he is always begging. A little sauciness on my part has the best effect when anything is wanted, for my uncle is very kind to me in his own fashion, which is not mine.

'We have made something of a nest in the last of the suite of rooms, the only one habitably small ; but it is wonderful where all the time in the day goes. My uncle likes me to ride with him in the morning, and I have to help granny air the horses in the afternoon ; and in the evening, when we are lucky enough to dine alone, I play them both asleep, unless they go to backgammon. Think of granny reduced to that ! We should be very happy when he is detained in his study, but that granny thinks it is bad for him. Dear granny ! I see the object of her life is to win him back to serious thoughts. She seems to think of him like a schoolboy who must be lured to find home pleasanter than idle ways ; and she begs me quite sadly to bear with him, and make him happy, to prevent him from longing after his counting-house at Lima. She tried to make him promise never to go back, but he has only promised never to go while she lives, and she seems to think it would be fatal, and to charge all his disregard of religious matters upon herself for having sent him out. If you could see her pleased smile when we extort a subscription, or when she gets him to church ; but when those South American mails come in on Sundays—alas ! Those accounts are his real element, and his moments of bliss are over the "Money-market and City intelligence," or in discussing railway shares with Sir Andrew. All the rest is an obstinate and

dismal allegiance to the days of Shrievalty, about as easy to recall as the days when the Pendragons wore golden collars and armlets. Imitated hospitality turns into ostentation ; and the people who seek after silver covers and French cookery are no more to my taste than they are, in good earnest, to Uncle Oliver's. The nice people, if there are any, won't come in our way, except Mr. Henderson ; and when we do pluck up courage to disgust Mr. Coachman by calling on Mrs. Henderson, we are very happy. But she is a wise woman, and will not bring her pretty Fanny into our world ; and when I press her, behold ! I remember what I used to think of patronage.

'But Louis has promised to come at Easter, and he will teach me a little more charity, I hope ; and, what is better (no, I don't mean that), will tell me about the dear, dear, trebly dear Terrace and all the doings. I hope you will begin your Sunday scheme ; but granny fears the bad set will not care, and the good will prefer having their families together. It is worse than I expected even of Mr. Purvis to refuse the afternoon service, when you offered to take all the trouble off his hands ; granny hopes you will take care what you are about with him. Tell Louis we have a famous letter from Mary to show him if he will bring us news of every one, and especially of his godchild. Contrary to custom, you tell us more about her than her mamma does.

'Your most affectionate Sister,

'CLARA.'

Before Easter, Charlotte's poor rival was lying at rest in Cheveleigh churchyard, and Jane's task of love was at an end.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AUNT CATHARINE'S HOME

The lady sleeps—O may her sleep,
As it is lasting, so be deep !
Heaven have her in its sacred keep !
This bed being changed for one more holy,
This room for one more melancholy,
Some tomb, that oft hath flung its black
And wing-like panels fluttering back,
Triumphant o'er the fluttering palls
Of her grand family funerals,—E. A. POE

THE summer was nearly over, when, one morning at breakfast, Louis surprised his father by a sound, half consternation, half amusement ; and handed him a note containing these words :—

'DEAR F,—There were three of us last night ; there are five this morning. Isabel and the twins are doing well. Heaven knows what is to become of us !

'Yours,

J. F.'

‘What would you have?’ said Lord Ormersfield, calmly. ‘The poorer people are, the more children they have!’

He went on with his own letters, while Louis laughed at the enunciation of this inverse ratio; and then took up the note again, to wonder at the tone of anxiety and distress, so unlike James. He went to call on Lady Conway, and was better satisfied to find that James had written in a lively strain to her, as if proud of his little daughters, and resolved not to be pitied. Of this he was in no danger from his sisters-in-law, who looked upon twin-girls as the only blessing needed to complete Isabel’s felicity, had devised three dozen names for them, and longed to be invited to Northwold to see them.

Nothing was heard of James for more than a week; and, as London grew hotter, dustier, and drearier than ever, Fitzjocelyn longed, more than he thought wholesome to confess, after Ormersfield turf, deep ravines, and rushing brooks. The sun shone almost through the blind of the open window on the large library table, where sat Louis at his own end, writing to his Inglewood bailiff, and now and then solacing himself by lifting with the feather of his pen one of the bells of a delicate lily in a glass before him—a new spectacle on the Earl’s writing-table; and so was a strip of vellum, with illuminations rich and rare—Louis’s indulgence when he felt he had earned an hour’s leisure. There was a ring at the door, a step on the stairs, and before the father and son stood James, his little black bag in his hand, like himself, all dust, and his face worn, heated, and tired.

‘Then you have not heard from Cheveleigh?’ he said, in answer to their astonished greetings, producing a note, which was eagerly read:—

‘DEAREST JEM,—My uncle says I may write to you, in case you can leave Isabel, that he will be glad to see you. I told you that dear grandmamma had a cold, and so we would not let her come to Isabel; but I little guessed what was coming. It only seemed a feverish cold, and Jane and I almost laughed at my uncle for choosing to send for a doctor. He was not alarmed at first, but yesterday she was inert and sleepy, and he asked for more advice. Dr. Hastings came to-day, and oh! Jem, he calls it a breaking up of the constitution, and does not think she will rally. She knows us, but she is almost always drowsy, and very hard to rouse. If you can come without hurting Isabel, I know you will. We want you all the more, because my uncle will not let me send for Mr. Danvers. Poor Uncle Oliver is dreadfully troubled.

‘Your most affectionate CLARA.’

‘Transplantation has killed her—I knew it would!’ said James, as Louis stood, with the note in his hand, as if not yet understanding the blow.

‘Nay,’ said the Earl, ‘it is an age at which we could hardly

hope she would long be spared. You could leave Mrs. James Frost with comfort ?

'Yes, Miss Mercy undertakes her—she is doing well—she would not hear of my staying. I must go on, the train starts at two,' he added, hastily, looking at the time-piece.

'We will send you,' said Lord Ormersfield. 'Take time to rest. You look very ill ! You should have some luncheon.'

'No, thank you !' said James, at first with the instinct of resistance ; but yielding and confessing, 'Charlotte went into hysterics, and I had nothing to eat before I came away.'

Louis came forward from the window where he had been standing as in a dream ; he laid his hand on James's shoulder, and said, 'I will go !' His voice was hardly audible, but clearing it, and striving to recall his thoughts, he added, 'Father, I can be spared. The division is not coming on to-night, or you could get me a pair.'

The Earl looked doubtfully at James.

'Yes, let me go,' said Louis. 'I must see her again. It has been mother and son between us.' And, hiding his face in his hands, he hurried out of the room.

'Let him come,' said James. 'If duty and affection claim a right, none have such as he.'

'I hesitate only as to acting unceremoniously by your uncle.'

'This is no moment for ceremony—no time to deprive her of whatever she loves best.'

'Be it so, then. His own feelings are his best passport, and well has she deserved all that he can ever feel ! And, James, if she should express any desire to see me, if I can be of any use in settling matters, or could promote any better understanding with your uncle, I am ready at a moment's notice. I would come at once, but that many might be burdensome to your uncle and sister.'

The two cousins were quickly on their way. James took a second-class ticket, the first time he had ever done so in travelling with his cousin. Fitzjocelyn placed himself beside him without remark.

James dozed as well as the narrow seat would permit, and only woke to chafe at each halt ; and Louis mused over the associations of those scenes, and last year's triumphant return. Had the change of habits truly hastened the decay of her powers ? had her son's toil and success been merely to bring her home to the grave of her fathers, at the expense of so many heartburnings, separations, and dissensions ? At least, he trusted that her last hours might be crowned by the peacemaker's joy, and that she might see strife and bitterness laid aside between Oliver, and Henry's only surviving son.

Alas ! it was not to be. The shutters and blinds were closed, and Clara met them at the door, her pale face and streaming eyes forestalling the tidings. The frame, hitherto so vigorous and active, had been spared long or weary decay ; and tranquil

torpor had mildly conducted the happy, gentle spirit to full repose. She had slumbered away without revival or suffering, as one who did 'rest from her labours,' and her eyes had been closed on the previous night.

Clara wept as she spoke; but she had been alone with her sorrow long enough to face it, and endure calmly.

Not so her brother. It was anguish to have come too late, and to have missed the last word and look; and he strode madly up and down the room, almost raving at the separation and removal which he declared had killed her.

'Oh, speak to him, Louis!' cried Clara. 'Oh, what shall I do?'

As she spoke, the door was opened, and Mr. Dynevor came in, with a grief-stricken look and quieter manner; but his entrance instantly silenced all James's demonstrations, and changed them into a haughty, compressed bitterness, as though he actually looked on him in the light of his grandmother's destroyer.

'Ah! James,' began his uncle, gently, 'I wish you had been here earlier!'

'I left home by the first train after hearing. I ought to have heard sooner.'

'I could not suppose you would choose to come here without serious reason,' said Oliver, with more dignity than usual. 'However, I would willingly forget, and you will remain here for the present.'

'I must apologize for having thrust myself on you, sir,' said Louis, 'but, indeed, I could not stay away. After what she has been to me, ever since I can remember her—' and tears cut him short.

'Sir, it does you honour!' returned Oliver. 'She was attached to you. I hope you will not leave us as yet.'

Louis felt as if he could not leave the house where what was mortal of his dear old aunt yet remained, and he likewise had a perception that he might be a support and assistance to Clara in keeping the peace between her brother and uncle; so he gratefully accepted the invitation.

Mr. Dynevor presently explained that he intended the funeral to take place at the end of the week.

'I can not be so long from home,' said James, in a quick, low voice.

Clara ran up to her uncle, laid her hand on his arm, and drew him into a window, whence he presently turned, saying, 'Your sister tells me that you cannot be so long absent in the present state of your family. If possible, the day shall be hastened.'

James was obliged to say, 'Thank you!' but any concession seemed to affect him like an injury.

Grievous work was it to remain at Cheveleigh, under the constant dread of some unbecoming outbreak between uncle and nephew. Fortunately, Oliver had too much on his hands to have much time to spend with the others; but when they

were together, there was scarcely a safe subject, not even the intended names of the twins. James made hasty answer that they had already received their names, Mercy and Salome. Louis and Clara both cried out incredulously.

'Yes,' said James. 'We don't like family names.'

'But such as those!'

'I wish nothing better for them than to be such another pair of faithful sisters. May they only do as well, poor children!'

The end was softer than the beginning, and there was a tight short sigh, that seemed to burst upward from a whole world of suppressed anxiety and despondence.

It was not easy to understand him; he would not talk of home, was brief about his little Catharine; and when Clara said something of Isabel's writings, formerly his great pride, and feared that she would have no more time for them, his blunt answer was, 'She ought not.'

These comparatively indifferent topics were the only resource; for he treated allusions to his grandmother as if they were rending open a wound, and it was only in his absence that Louis and Clara could hold the conversations respecting her, which were their chief comfort and relief. If they were certain that Oliver was busy, and James writing letters, they would walk up and down the sheltered alley, where Louis had last year comforted Clara. The green twilight and chequered shade well accorded with the state of their minds, darkened, indeed, by one of the severest losses that could ever befall either of them, though it was a sorrow full of thankfulness and blessed hope.

Louis spoke of his regret that scenes of uncongenial gaiety should have been forced upon her last year.

'I believe it made very little difference to her,' said Clara. 'She did just what Uncle Oliver wished, but only as she used to play with us, no more; nay, rather less for her own amusement than as she would play at battledore, or at thread-paper verses.'

'And she was not teased nor harassed?'

'I think not. She was grieved if I were set against Uncle Oliver's plans, and really hurt if she could not make him think as she did about right and wrong, but otherwise she was always bright. She never found people tiresome; she could find something kind to say to and for the silliest; and when my uncle's display was most provoking, she would only laugh at "poor Oliver's" odd notions of doing her honour. I used to be quite ashamed of the fuss I would make when I thought a thing vulgar; when I saw that sort of vanity by the side of her real indifference, springing from unworldliness.'

'And then her mornings were quiet?'

'More quiet than at home. While we were riding, she used to sit with her dear old big Bible, and the two or three old books she was so fond of. You remember her Sutton and her Bishop Horne. And often she would show me some passage that

had struck her as prettier than ever, well as she had always known it. Once she said she was very thankful for the leisure time, free from household cares, and even from friendly gossip ; for she said first she had been gay, then she had been busy, and had never had time to meditate quietly.'

'So she made a cloister of this grand house. Ah ! I trusted she was past being hurt by external things. That grand old age was like a pure glad air where worldly fumes could not mount up. My only fear would have been this unlucky estrangement making her unhappy.'

'I think I may tell you how she felt it,' said Clara ; 'I am trying to tell James, but I don't know whether I can. She said she had come to perceive that she had confounded pride with independence. She blamed herself, so that I could not bear to hear it, for the grand fine things in her life. She said pride had made her stand alone, and unkindly spurn much that was kindly meant. I don't mean that she repented of the actions, but of the motives ; she said the glory of being beholden to no one had run through everything ; and had been very hurtful even to Uncle Oliver. She never let him know all her straits, and was too proud, she said, to ask, when she was hurt at his not offering help, and so she made him seem more hard-hearted, and let us become set against him. She said she had fostered the same temper in poor Jem, who had it strongly enough by inheritance, and that she had never known the evil, nor understood it as pride, till she saw the effects.'

'Did they make her unhappy ?'

'She cried when she spoke of it, and I have seen her in tears at church, and found her eyes red when she had been alone, but I don't think it was a hard, cruel sorrow ; I think the sunshine of her nature managed to beam through it.'

'The sunshine was surely love,' said Louis, 'making the rainbow of hope on the tears of repentance. Perhaps it is a blessing vouchsafed to the true of heart to become aware of such a hidden constitutional infirmity in time to wash it out with blessed tears like those.'

'Hidden,' said Clara, 'yes, indeed it was, even from herself, because it never showed in manner, like my pride ; she was gracious and affable to all the world. I heard the wedding-women saying, "she had not one bit of pride," and when I told her of it, she shook her head, and laughed sadly, and said that was the kind of thing which had taken her in.'

'Common parlance is a deceitful thing,' said Louis, sighing ; 'people can't even be sincere without doing harm ! Well, I had looked to see her made happy by harmony between those two !'

'She gave up the hope of seeing it,' said Clara, 'but she looked to it all the same. She said meekly one day that it might be her penalty to see them at variance in her own lifetime, but over her grave perhaps they would be reconciled, and her prayers be answered, How she did love Uncle Oliver ! Do

you know, Louis, what she was to him showed me what the mother's love must be, which we never missed, because—because we had her !'

'Don't talk of it, Clara,' said Louis, hastily ; 'we cannot dwell on ourselves, and bear it patiently !'

It was truly the loss of a most tender mother to them both ; bringing for the first time the sense of orphanhood on the girl, left between the uncongenial though doting uncle, and the irritable though affectionate brother ; and Louis, though his home was not broken up, suffered scarcely less. His aunt's playful sweetness had peculiarly accorded with his disposition, and the affection and confidence of his fond, clinging nature had fastened themselves upon her, all the more in the absence of his own Mary. Each loss seemed to make the other more painful. Aunt Kitty's correspondence was another link cut away between him and Peru, and he had never known such a sense of dreariness in his whole life. Clara was going patiently and quietly through those trying days, with womanly consideration ; believing herself supported by her brother, and being so in fact by the mere sisterly gratification of his presence, though she was far more really sustained and assisted by Fitzjocelyn. How much happier was the sorrow of Louis and Clara than that of James or Oliver ! Tempers such as those in which the uncle and nephew but too closely resembled each other were soured, not softened by grief, and every arrangement raised discussions which did not tend to bring them nearer together.

Oliver designed a stately funeral. Nothing was too much for him to lavish on his mother, and he was profuse in orders for hangings, velvet, blazonry, mutes, and hired mourners, greedy of offers of the dreary state of empty carriages, demanding that of Lord Ormersfield, and wanting James to write to Lady Conway for the same purpose.

Nothing could be more adverse to the feelings of the grandchildren ; but Clara had been schooled into letting her uncle have his way, and knew that dear granny would have said Oliver might do as he pleased with her in death as in life, owning the affection so unpleasantly manifested ; James, on the other hand, could see no affection, nothing but disgusting parade, as abhorrent to his grandmother's taste as to his own. He thought he had a right to be consulted, for he by no means believed himself to have abdicated his headship of the family ; and he made his voice heard entirely without effect, except the indignation of his uncle, and the absence of the Conway carriage ; although Lord Ormersfield wrote that he should bring Sir Walter in his own person, thus leaving James divided between satisfaction in any real token of respect to his grandmother, and dislike to gratifying Oliver's ostentation by the production of his baronet kin.

Sydney Calcott wrote to him in the name of various former scholars of Mrs. Frost, anxious to do her the last honours by

attending the funeral. Homage to her days of gallant exertion in poverty was most welcome and touching to the young people ; but their uncle, without taste to understand it, wishing to forget her labours, and fancying them discreditable to a daughter of the Dynevors, received the proposal like an indignity ; and but for Fitzjocelyn's mediation and expostulations, it would have been most unsuitably rejected. He was obliged to take the answer into his own hands, since Oliver insisted that his mother was to be regarded in no light save that of Mrs. Dynevor, of Cheveleigh ; and James was equally resolved that she should be only Mrs. Frost, of Dynevor Terrace.

It was heart-sickening to see these bickerings over the grave of one so loving and so beloved ; and very trying to be always on the alert to obviate the snappings that might at any time become a sharp dissension ; but nothing very distressing actually arose until the last day before the funeral, when the three cousins were sitting together in the morning-room ; James writing letters.

'I am asking Lady Conway to give you a bed to-morrow night, Clara,' he said. 'We shall be at home by three o'clock.'

'Oh, Jem !' said Clara, clasping her hands to keep them from trembling ; 'I never thought of that.'

'You are not ready ! That is unlucky, for I cannot come to fetch you ; but I suppose you can travel down with Jane. Only I should have thought it easier to do the thing at once.'

'But, Jem ! has my uncle said anything ? Does he wish me to go ?'

James laid down his pen, and stood upright, as if he did not understand her words.

Clara came up to him, saying, 'I believe I ought to do what he may wish.'

'I told you,' said James, as if her words were not worth considering, 'that you need only remain here on her account, who no longer needs you.'

Louis would have left them to themselves, but Clara's glance sued for his protection, and, as he settled himself in his chair, she spoke with more decision.—'Dear James, nothing would make me so happy as to go to dear home ; but I do not think grandmamma would like me to leave Uncle Oliver.'

'Oh, very well,' said James, sitting down to his writing, as if he had done with her ; 'I understand.'

'Dear James ! O tell me you are not angry with me ! Tell me you think I am right !' cried Clara, alarmed by his manner.

'Quite right in *one* point of view,' he said, with acrimony.

'James,' said Louis, very low, but so as to make them both start, 'that is not the way to treat your sister !'

'We will renew the discussion another time, if you wish it, Clara,' said James.

'No,' said Clara, 'I wish Louis to be here. He will judge for me,' and she spoke clearly, her face colouring. 'It was grand-

mamma's great wish that I should love my uncle. She used to beg me to be patient with him, and rejoiced to see us together. She often said he must not be left with no one to make a home for him, and to go out to Lima again.'

'Did she ever desire you to remain here?'

'No,' said Clara, 'she never did; but I am convinced that if she had known how soon she was to leave us, she would have done so. I feel as much bound as if she had. I have heard her call him my charge. And not only so, but my uncle has never varied in his kindness to me; and when he worked all his life for grandmamma, and my father, it would be wicked and cruel in me—if he does care for me—to forsake him, now he has lost them all, and is growing old.'

'You need not scruple on that score,' said James. 'He has attained his object, and made the most of it. He is free now, and he will soon find a Rosita, if his mines are not sufficient for him.'

'James, you should not say wrong things,' said Clara.

'I am not likely to think it wrong, whatever you may. I have no expectations. Do not rise up in arms against me, Fitz-jocelyn; I do not accuse her. I might have foreseen it. She meant well at first, but the Terrace cannot bear competition with a place like this. Where two so-called duties clash, she is at perfect liberty to make her choice. It would not be easy to come down to what I have to offer. I understand. The world will call it a wise choice. Say no more, Clara, I feel no anger.'

She attempted no words; she clasped her hands over her face, and ran out of the room.

'James,' said Louis, rising, indignation rendering his voice more low and clearly distinct than ever, 'I little thought to hear you insult that orphan sister of yours in her grief. No! I shall not defend her; I shall go to give her what comfort I can. Heaven help her, poor lonely child!'

He was gone. James paced about in desperation, raving against Louis for maintaining what he thought Clara's self-deception; and, in the blindness of anger, imagining that their ultra-generosity would conduct them to the repair of Ormersfield with the revenues of Cheveleigh; and, disdainful as he was, it seemed another cruel outrage that his rightful inheritance should be in the hands of another, and his children portionless. He was far too wrathful to have any consistency or discrimination in his anger, and he was cruelly wounded at finding that his sister deserted him, as he thought, for her uncle's riches, and that his own closest friend was ready to share the spoil.

In the stillness of the house, the sound of a door had revealed to Louis where to seek his cousin. It was in the grand saloon, where the closed shutters availed not to exclude the solid beams of slanting sunlight falling through the crevices, and glancing on the gilding, velvet, and blazonry upon the costly coffin, that shut her out from the dear tender hands and lips that had never

failed to caress away her childish griefs. At first, the strange broad lines of shadowy light in the gloom were all he could see, but one ray tinged with paly light a plaited tress, which could only be Clara's flaxen hair.

She had flung herself, crouching in a heap, on the floor, never stirring, so that he almost feared she had fainted; and, kneeling on one knee beside her, spoke soothingly: 'My poor little dear Clary, this is the worst of all; but you know it was not Jem who spoke. It was only prejudice and temper. He is not himself.'

The dim light seemed to encourage Clara to lift her head to listen to the kind words. 'Was I so very wrong?' she murmured; 'you know I never thought of that! Will he forgive me, and let me come home? But, oh, granny! and what is to become of my uncle?' she ended, with a sound of misery.

'Not here, not now, Clara—' said Louis. 'She is in perfect peace; unhurt by our unhappy dissensions; she is with Him who looks at hearts, who can take away all variance.'

There was a short space of silence, as the two cousins knelt in the darkened room, in the sunbeams, which seemed as if they could not yet forsake her who had lived in the light of love.

Presently Louis gave Clara his hand to raise her, and led her into the adjoining room, also dim, but full of sweet fragrant breezes from the garden. He seated her on a low couch, and stood by, anxiously watching her.

'If he had only told me I was wrong!' she sighed.

'He could not tell you so, Clara, for it is not wrong, and he knows it is not. He will thank you by and by for not attending to him, now that he does not know what he says. He is fairly distracted with this grief coming upon his home cares.'

'Cares at dear, dear happy home!' cried Clara. 'Never!'

'Ah, Clara! I fear that much comfort went away with dear granny. I think he is overtaking himself at the school; and three children within a year may well make a man anxious and oppressed.'

'And I have vexed and disappointed him more,' exclaimed she. 'No wonder he was angry, and ready to impute anything! But he will believe me, he will forgive me, he will take me home.'

'It is my belief,' said Fitzjocelyn, in his peculiar way, 'that the worst injury you could do to James would be to give way to the spirit that has possessed him.'

'But, Louis,' cried Clara, wildly astonished, 'I must go; I can't have Jem saying these things of me.'

'His saying them does not make them true.'

'He is my brother. He has the only right to me. If I must choose between him and my uncle, he must be mine—mine.'

'You have not to choose between him and your uncle. You have to choose between right and wrong—between his frenzy and his true good.'

'My brother! my brother! I go with my brother!' was still her vehement cry. Without listening to her cousin's last words, she made a gesture to put him aside, and rose to hurry to her brother.

But Louis stood before her, and spoke gravely. 'Very well. Yield yourself to his management. Go back to be another burden upon a household poor enough already to sour him with cares. Let him tell your uncle that both his brother's children loathe the fruit of the self-sacrifice of a lifetime. Transgress your grandmother's wishes; condemn that poor man to a desolate, objectless, covetous old age; make the breach irreconcilable for ever; and will James be the better or the happier for your allowing his evil temper the full swing?'

Clara wrung her hands. 'My uncle! Yes, what shall I do with my uncle? If I could only have them both?'

'This way you would have neither. Keep the straight path, and you may end in having both.'

'Straight—I don't know what straight is! It must be right to cling to my own brother in his noble poverty. Oh! that he should imagine me caring for this horrid, horrid state and grandeur!'

Louis recurred to the old argument, that James did not know what he was saying, and recalled her to the remembrance of what she had felt to be the right course before James's ebullition. She owned it most reluctantly; but oh! she said, would James still forgive her, and not believe such dreadful things, but trust and be patient with her, and perhaps Uncle Oliver might after all be set on going to Peru, and beyond remonstrance. Then it would all come right—no, not right, for granny had dreaded his going. Confused and distressed by the conflicting claims, Clara was thankful for the present respite given to her by Louis's promise that his father should sound her uncle as to his wishes and intentions. Lord Ormersfield's upright, unimpassioned judgment appeared like a sort of refuge from the conflict of the various claims, and he was besides, in a degree, her guardian, being the sole executor of the only will which Mrs. Frost had ever made, soon after the orphans came under her charge, giving the Terrace to James, and dividing the money in the Funds between the two.

Weeping, but not unhopeful—convinced, though not acknowledging it—inly praying for strength and patience, and hungering for one kind word from James—Clara quitted that almost brother, in whose counsel he had constrained her to seek relief, and went to her own chamber, there to throw herself on the guidance of that Friend who sticketh closer than a brother.

The remaining part of the day passed quietly. James did not consciously make any difference in his manner, meaning to be still affectionate, though disappointed, and pitying her mistake, both as to her present happiness and future good.

Lord Ormersfield and Walter arrived in the evening, and

James applied himself to finding occupation for his brother-in-law, whom he kept out of the way in the garden very satisfactorily. The Earl was so softened and sorrowful, that Clara hardly knew him. He deeply felt the loss of the kind, gentle aunt, whose sympathy had been more to him than he had known at the time; the last remnant of the previous generation, the last link with his youth, and he was even more grieved for the blank she left with Louis than for himself. By Louis's desire, he inquired into Oliver's intentions. 'Must stay here,' was the answer. 'Can't leave that child alone with the property. I can look to the Equatorial Company here—must do without me out there. No, no, I can't leave the girl to her brother; he'd teach her his own nasty, spiteful temper, and waste the property on all those brats. No, I'm fixed here; I must look after Henry's child, fine girl, good-tempered girl; takes after Henry; don't you think so?'

That Clara took after her father in anything but being tall and fair, would hardly have been granted by any one who knew her better than the Earl, but he readily allowed it, and Oliver proceeded:—'As long as she does not marry, here I am; but I trust some one will soon take the care of her off my hands—a man who would look after the property well. She's a good girl too, and the finest figure in the whole county; lucky him who gets her. I shall be sorry to part with the child, too, but I shall be working for her, and there's nothing left that cares a rush for me now, so I might as well be out of the way of the young things. I know the old place at Lima, and the place knows me; and what do I care for this now my mother is gone? If I could only see Clara safe settled here, then I should care as little what became of me as I suppose she would.'

The Earl was touched by the dreary, desponding tone of the reply, and reported it to Louis and Clara in such terms, that Clara's decision was made at once, namely, that it would be wrong and cruel to cast away her uncle, and be swayed by James's prejudice; and Lord Ormersfield told her with grave approval that she was quite right, and that he hoped that James would recover from his unreasonable folly.

'Make Jem forgive me,' said Clara, faintly, as her announcement of her purpose, when she finally sought her room, obliged to be thought meanly of, rather than do ill; denying her fondest affections, cutting herself off from all she loved, and with but this consolation, that she was doing as grandmamma would have bidden her. Oh, how her heart yearned after home!

On the morrow, Clara sorrowed in her solitary chamber alone with faithful Jane, who, amid her burst of tears, felt the one satisfaction, that her dear mistress had lived to be buried like the stock she came of, and who counted the carriages and numbered the scarfs, like so many additional tributes from the affection of her dear Master Oliver.

Once on that day James was visibly startled from his heavy,

stern mood of compressed, indignant sorrow. It was as he advanced to the entrance of the vault, and his eye was struck by a new and very handsome tablet on the wall. It was to the father, mother, and young brother and sisters, whose graves had been hastily made far away in the time of the pestilence, the only Dynevors who did not lie in the tombs of their fathers. For one moment James moved nearer to his uncle. Could he have spoken then, what might not have followed? but it was impossible, and the impulse passed away.

But he was kind when he hurried up-stairs for a last embrace to Clara. He still felt fond, brotherly, and compassionate; and all the more, because she had proved more weak against temptation than he had expected. His farewell was, 'Good-bye, my poor Clara, God bless you.'

'Oh, thank you!' cried Clara, from the bottom of her heart. 'You forgive me, James?'

'I forgive; I am sorry for you, my poor child. Mind, Dynevor Terrace is still your home, if you do not find the happiness you expect in your chosen lot.'

'Happiness!' but he had no time to hear. He was gone, while she sobbed out her message of love for Isabel, and Louis ran up, pale with repressed suffering, and speaking with difficulty, as he wrung her hand, and murmured, 'Oh, Clara! may we but abide patiently.'

After his good-bye, he turned back again to say, 'I'm selfish; but let me put you in mind not to let the Lima correspondence drop.'

'Oh, no, no; you know I won't.'

'Thank you! And let me leave you Mary's key-note of comfort, "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He will bring it to pass."'

'Thank you,' said Clara, in her turn, and she was left alone.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE FROST HOUSEHOLD

The wind of late breathed gently forth,
Now shifted east, and east by north.
Bare trees and shrubs but ill, you know,
Could shelter them from rain or snow;
Stepping into their nests they paddled,
Themselves were chilled, their eggs were addled;
Soon every father bird and mother
Grew quarrelsome, and pecked each other.

Pairing Time Anticipated.—COWPER

THREE weeks longer did the session drag on, but on the joyful day when release was given, Lord Ormersfield was surprised to find Mr. Dynevor's card upon his table, with an address at Farrance's hotel.

Louis alone was at leisure to repair thither. He found Clara.

alone, looking as if her grief were still very fresh, and, though striving to speak gaily, the tears near the surface.

'We are going abroad,' she said; 'Uncle Oliver thinks it a part of my education, and declares he will not have me behind the Miss Brittons. We are bound straight for Switzerland.'

'Lucky girl,' said Louis.

'I'm sure I don't care for it,' said Clara; 'mountains and pictures are not a bit in my line, unless I had Isabel and you, Louis, to make me care.'

'Learn, then,' said Louis; 'it shows that your education is defective. Yes, I see,' he continued, as Clara sighed heavily, 'but you don't know the good it will do you to have your mind forcibly turned aside.'

'If I could only sit quiet in a corner,' said Clara.

'So you will, in many a corner of a railway-carriage.'

She smiled a little. 'The truth is,' she said, 'that poor Uncle Oliver cannot be quiet. I can't see what pleasure Italy will be to him, but he is too miserable at home. I never saw such restless unhappiness!' and her eyes filled with tears. 'Oh, Louis! I am glad you would not let me say anything about leaving him. Sometimes when he bids me good night, he puts his arm round me, and says so pitifully that I do not care for him. Do you know, I think mine is the little spar of love that he tries to cling to in the great shipwreck; and I feel quite sorry and hypocritical because it is such a poor, miserable shred.'

'It will grow,' said Louis, smiling.

'I don't know; he is terribly provoking sometimes—and without dear granny to hinder the rubs. O, Louis! it is true that there is no bearing to stay at home in those great empty rooms!'

'And Jane?'

'Oh, she goes,' said Clara, recovering a smile; 'she is firmly persuaded that we shall run into another revolution, and as she could not frighten us by the description of your wounds, she decides to come and dress ours when we get any. Dear old Jenny, I am glad she goes; she is the only creature I can talk to; but, Louis, before my uncle comes in, I have something to give you.'

It was the letters that Mary had written to her aunt since the parting, and the Spanish books which she had left in her charge.

'It is very kind in you, Clara,' said Louis, fervently.

They talked of Mary, and a little of James, from whom Clara had once heard; but it had been a stiff letter, as if a barrier were between them, and then Mr. Dynevor came in, and seemed pleased to find Louis there; even asking him whether he could not join them on their tour, and help Clara to speak French.

'No, thank you, sir,' said Louis; 'I am afraid my company brought no good luck last time.'

'Never mind that—manage better now—ha, Clara!'

'It would be very nice; but he has a great deal too much to do at home,' said Clara.

Oliver would not be persuaded that Fitzjocelyn would not meet them abroad, and began magniloquently talking of his courier, and his route ; and while he was looking for the map, the two cousins smiled, and Clara said,—‘ Lucky you to have work at home, and to stay with it.’

‘ Only I say, Clara, when you break down anywhere, send me a telegraph.’

‘ No such good luck,’ sighed Clara.

‘ So he won’t come,’ said her uncle, when he was gone ; ‘ but we shall have him following us yet—Ha ! ha ! Never mind, Clara.’

Clara laughed. She knew what her uncle meant, but the notion was to her too impossible and ridiculous even to need a blush. She did not think the world contained Louis’s equal ; but she had always known that his love was disposed of, and she no more thought of wishing for it than for any other impossible thing. His affection for Mary gave her no more pain than did that of James for Isabel ; and she would have treated with scorn and anger anything that impeached his constancy. The pleasure with which he received Mary’s letters was the single satisfaction that she carried away with her.

And so she was borne away, and her sad heart could not choose but be somewhat enlivened by change and novelty, while her uncle made it his business to show her everything as rapidly as it could be seen, apparently with no relish himself for aught but perpetual movement.

So passed the autumn with Clara. It was not much brighter at Dynevor Terrace. Clara, being still under age, had it not in her power to resign her half of her grandmother’s income, even if her brother would have accepted it ; and 70*l.* made a difference in such an income as James’s, more especially as his innovations did not tend to fill the school.

Murmurs were going about that Mr. Frost was severe, or that he was partial. Some censured his old opinions, others his new studies ; one had been affronted by being almost told his boy was a dunce, another hated all this new-fangled nonsense. The ladies were all, to a woman, up against his wife, her airs, her poverty, her twins, and her housekeeping ; and seldom spoke of her save to contrast her with good old Mrs. Frost. And then it was plain that something was wrong between him and his uncle, and no one could believe but that his temper had been the cause. The good Miss Faithfulls struggled in vain to silence scandal, and keep it from ‘ coming round’ ; and luckily Isabel was the last person likely either to hear or resent.

The boys met with decreased numbers after the holidays ; and James received them with undiminished energy, but with failing patience, and a temper not improved by the late trans-actions at Cheveleigh, and fretted, as Louis had divined, by home cares.

Of all living women, Isabel was one of the least formed by habits or education to be an economical housewife and the

mother of twins. Maternal love did not develop into unwearied delight in infant companionship, nor exclusive interest in baby smiles; and while she had great visions for the future education of her little maidens, she was not desirous to prolong the time spent in their society, but in general preferred peace and Sir Hubert. On the other hand, James was an unusually caressing father. After hours among rough inattentive boys, nothing rested him so much as to fondle those tender creatures; his eldest girl knew him, and was in ecstacy whenever he approached; and the little pair of babies, by their mere soft helplessness, gave him an indescribable sense of fondness and refreshment. His little ones were all the world to him, and he could not see how a pattern mother should ever be so happy as with them around her. He forgot the difference between the pastime of an hour and the employment of a day. The need of such care on her part was the greater since the nursery establishment was deficient. The grand nurse had almost abdicated on the double addition to her charge, and had only been bribed to stay by an ill-spared increase in wages, and a share in an underling, who was also to help Charlotte in her housemaid's department. Nevertheless, the nurse was always complaining; the children, though healthy, always crying; and their father always certain it was somebody's fault. Nor did the family expenses diminish, retrench his own indulgences as he might. It was the mistress's eye that was wanting, and Isabel did not know how to use it. The few domestic cares that she perceived to be her duty were gone through as weary tasks, and her mind continued involved in her own romantic world, where she was oblivious of all that was troublesome or vexatious. Now and then she was aware of a sluggish dullness that seemed to be creeping over her higher aspirations—a want of glow and feeling on religious subjects, even in the most sacred moments; and she wondered and grieved at a condition, such as she had never experienced in what she had thought far more untoward circumstances. She did not see the difference between doing her best when her will was thwarted, and her present life of neglect and indulgence. Nothing roused her; she did not perceive omissions that would have fretted women of housewifely instincts, and her soft dignity and smooth temper felt few annoyances; and though James could sometimes be petulant, he was always withheld from reproving her both by his enthusiastic fondness, and his sense that for him she had quitted her natural station of ease and prosperity.

On a dark hazy November afternoon, when the boys had been unusually obtuse and mischievous, and James, worn-out, wearied, and uncertain whether his cuts had alighted on the most guilty heads, strode home with his arm full of Latin exercises, launched them into the study, and was running up to the drawing-room, when he almost fell over Charlotte, who was scouring the stairs.

She gave a little start and scream, and stood up to let him

pass. He was about to rebuke her for doing such work at such an hour ; but he saw her flushed, panting, and evidently very tired, and his wrath was averted. Hurrying on to the drawing-room, he found Isabel eagerly writing. She looked up with a pretty smile of greeting ; but he only ran his hand through his already disordered hair, and exclaimed—

‘Our stairs are like the Captain of Knockdunder’s. You never know they are cleaned, except by tumbling over the bucket and the maid.’

‘Are they being done?’ said Isabel, quietly. ‘I suppose the maids were busy this morning.’

‘And Charlotte, too! She looks half dead. I thought Ellen was to do such work, and ought to have done it in proper time.’

‘Little Catharine is so fretful, that Ellen cannot be spared from the nursery.’

‘I suppose she might be, if you were not absorbed in that writing.’

‘I had the children with me while the servants were at dinner ; but Kitty was so troublesome, that I could not keep her. I am particularly anxious to finish this.’

‘Some people would think a sick child more engrossing than that—’ He had very nearly said trash, but he broke off short.

‘There is nothing really the matter with her,’ began Isabel, composedly ; but James did not wait to listen, and muttering, ‘That girl will be killed if she goes on,’ he ran up to the nursery, whence he already heard a sound of low fretting.

The child was sitting on the nurse’s lap, with a hot red spot on one cheek, teased and disturbed by the noises that the lesser ones were constantly making, as one lay in her cot, and the other was carried about by the girl. As he entered, she shrieked joyously, and stretched out her arms ; and Kitty was at once clinging, hugging round his neck. Sending Ellen down to finish the stairs, he carried off the little girl, fondling and talking to her, and happy in her perfect content. But he did not go to the drawing-room. ‘No, no, mamma must not be interrupted,’ he bitterly thought, as he carried her down to the fireless study, hung his plaid round himself and her, and walked up and down the room with her, amusing her till she fell into a slumber on his shoulder.

Isabel could not at once resume her pen. Her even temper was for once ruffled, and her bosom swelled at the thought that his reproach was unjust ; she was willing to do what was fitting, and he ought not to expect her to be an absolute nursery-maid. Women must keep up the tone of their own minds, and she might be being useful to the world as well as to her own family. If he wanted a mere household drudge, why had he not looked elsewhere? Up went her queenly head, as she believed her powers were meant for other things ; but her heart gave a painful throb at the recollection that poverty had been her voluntary choice, and had seemed perfect felicity with James.

Alas! she loved, honoured, and admired him; as her upright, unselfish, uncompromising husband; but worries and rebukes, and tart answers, had made many a rent in the veil in which her fancy had enfolded him. Sir Roland had disappeared, and James and Sir Hubert were falling farther and farther asunder.

And Isabel sighed, partly at the memory of the imaginary being for whom she had taken James, and partly at the future prospect, the narrow sphere, the choice between solitude and dull society, the homely toils that must increase, worn-out garments, perpetual alphabets, children always whining, and James always irritated, thinking her remiss, and coming in with that furrow on his forehead, and his hair standing up wildly. She shrank from the contemplation, took her letter-case on her knee, moved close to the fire to profit by the light, stirred up a clear flame, and proceeded with the benevolent hermit, who came to the rescue when Sir Hubert was at the last gasp. Adeline had received his beautiful resigned words, the hermit had transported him into his hut, and comforted Adeline, and was beginning a consolatory harangue, making revelations that were to set everything right; when just as he had gone as far as 'My son, know that I did not always wear this amice,' there was a tap at the door, and she saw Fitzjocelyn, who had been at Oakstead for the last few weeks, attending to some matters connected with his constituency.

'Ah! is it you?' she said, her lap too full of papers for her to rise. 'I did not know you were come home.'

'I came yesterday; and what company do you think I had in the train as far as Estminster?'

'Ah, I can guess! How does Louisa look?'

'Rather languid; but Estminster is to work wonders. She declares that Northwold is her best cure, and I am speculating whether she will prevail. I think Lady Conway dreads your example.'

'Mamma does not allow for the force of imagination,' said Isabel, not exactly knowing what prompted either the words or the sigh.

'I am come to ask if you will kindly give me a dinner. My father is gone to the book-club meeting, so I thought we would try to revive old times,' he said, smiling, but sadly, for the present scene was little like the No. 5 of old times.

'We shall be delighted,' said Isabel, with alacrity, relieved at avoiding a *tête-à-tête* with her husband at present, and refreshed by the sight of one belonging to her former life, and external to her present round of monotonous detail. 'Fortunately, it is not a lecture night, and James will be very glad.'

'I suppose he is not come in from school?'

'Yes, he is. I think he is in the study. I will let him know,' she said, with her hand on the bell.

'I will go to him,' said Louis, departing out of consideration that she might wish for space to attend to dinner, room, and

dress. The two last were scarcely in such a state as he had been used to see at No. 5: books were on the sofa, the table-cover hung awry; the Dresden Shepherd's hat was grimed, and his damsel's sprigged gown hemmed with dust; there were no flowers in the vases, which his aunt had never left unsupplied; and Isabel, though she could not be otherwise than handsome and refined, had her crape rumpled, and the heavy folds of her dark hair looking quite ready for the evening toilette; and, as she sat on her low seat by the fire, the whole had an indescribable air of comfort passing into listless indulgence.

Fitzjocelyn politely apologized to Ellen for a second time stepping over her soapy deluge, and, as he opened the study door with a preliminary knock, a voice, as sharp and petulant as it was low, called out, 'Hollo! Be quiet there, can't you! You've no business here yet, and I have no time to waste on your idleness.'

'I am sorry to hear it,' said Louis, advancing into the dim light of the single bedroom candle, which only served to make visible the dusky, unshuttered windows, and the black gulf of empty grate. James was sitting by the table, with his child wrapped in the plaid, asleep on his breast, and his disengaged hand employed in correcting exercises. Without moving, he held it out, purple and chilled, exclaiming, 'Ha! Fitzjocelyn, I took you for that lout of a Garrett.'

'Is this an average specimen of your reception of your scholars?'

'I was afraid of his waking the child. She has been unwell all day, and I have scarcely persuaded her to go to sleep.'

'Emulating Hooker?'

'As little in patience as in judgment,' sighed James.

'And which of them is it who is lulled by the strains of *As in presenti?*'

'Which?' said James, somewhat affronted. 'Can't you tell sixteen months from five?'

'I beg her pardon; but I can't construct a whole child from an inch of mottled leg—as Professor Owen would a megalosaurus from a tooth. Does she walk?'

'Poor child, she *must*!' said James. 'She thinks it very hard to have two sisters so little younger than herself,'—and he peeped under the plaid at the little brown head, and drew it closer round, with a look of almost melancholy tenderness, guarding carefully against touching her with his cold hands.

'She will think it all the better by and by,' said Louis.

'You had better not stay here in the cold. I'll come when I have heard that boy's imposition and looked over these exercises.' And he ran his hand through his hair again.

'Don't! You look like enough to a lion looking out of a bush to frighten ten boys already,' said Louis. 'I'll do the exercises,' pulling the copy-books away. 'What, you don't trust me?' as James detained them.

'No, I don't,' said James, his cousin's brightness awakening his livelier manner. 'It needs an apprenticeship to be up to their blunders.'

'Let me read them to you. I gave notice to Isabel that I am come to dinner, and no doubt she had rather I were disposed of.'

James objected no farther, and the dry labour was illuminated by the discursive remarks and moralizings which Louis allowed to flow in their natural idle course, both to divert his dispirited cousin, and to conceal from himself how much cause there was for depression. When the victim of the imposition approached, Louis prevented the dreaded clumsy entrance, seized on a Virgil, and himself heard the fifty lines, scarcely making them serve their purpose as a punishment, but sending the culprit away in an unusually amiable temper.

Services from Louis were too natural to James to be requited with thanks; but he was not uncivil in his notice of a wrong tense that had been allowed to pass, and the question was argued with an eagerness which showed that he was much enlivened. On the principle that Louis must care for all that was his, as he rose to take the still sleeping child up-stairs, he insisted that his cousin should come with him, if only for the curiosity of looking at the other two little animals, and learning the difference between them and Kitty, at whom he still looked as if her godfather had insulted her.

It was pretty to see his tenderness, as he detached the little girl from her hold, and laid her in the cot, making a little murmuring sound; and boasted how she would have shown off if awake, and laughed over her droll little jealousies of his even touching the twins. As she was asleep, he might venture; and it was comical to hear him declaring that no one need mistake them for each other, and to see him trying to lay them side by side on his knees to be compared, when they would roll over, and interlace their little scratching fingers; and Louis stood by teasing him, and making him defend their beauty in terms that became extravagant. He was really happy here; the careworn look smoothed away, the sharpness left his tones, and there was nothing but joyous exultation and fondness in his whole manner.

The smile did not last long, for Louis was well-nigh thrown down-stairs by a dustpan in a dark corner, and James was heard muttering that nothing in that house was ever in its right place; and while Louis was suggesting that it was only himself who was not in the right place, they entered the drawing-room, which, like the lady, was in the same condition as that in which he had left it. Since Isabel had lost Marianne and other appliances, she had thought it not worth while to dress for dinner; so nothing had happened, except that the hermit had proved to be Adeline's great uncle, and had begun to clear up the affair of the sacrilege.

He was reluctant to leave off when the gentlemen appeared; but Isabel shut him up, and quietly held out the portfolio to

James, who put it on the side-table, and began to clear the books away and restore some sort of order; but it was a task beyond his efforts.

Dinner was announced by Charlotte, as usual, all neat grace and simplicity, in her black dress and white apron, but flushed and heated by exertions beyond her strength. All that depended on her had been well done; but it would not seem to have occurred to her mistress that three people ate more than two; and to Louis, who had been too busy to take any luncheon, the two dishes seemed alarmingly small. One was of haricot mutton, the other of potatoes; and Charlotte might be seen to blush as she carried Lord Fitzjocelyn the plate containing a chop resembling India-rubber, decorated with grease and with two balls of nearly raw carrot, and followed it up with potatoes apparently all bruises.

Louis talked vigorously of Virginia and Louisa—secretly marvelling how his hosts had brought themselves down to such fare. Isabel was dining without apparently seeing anything amiss, and James attempted nothing but a despairing toss of his chin, as he pronounced the carrots underdone. After the first course there was a long interval, during which Isabel and Louis composedly talked about the public meeting which he had been attending, and James fidgeted in the nervousness of hardly-restrained displeasure; but suddenly a frightful shrieking arose, and he indignantly cried, 'That girl!'

'Poor Charlotte in her hysterics again,' said Isabel, moving off quickly for her, with the purple scent-bottle at her chatelaine.

'Isabel makes her twice as bad,' exclaimed James; 'to pet her with *eau-de-Cologne* is mere nonsense. Some day I shall throw a bucket of cold water over her.'

Isabel had left the door open, and they heard her softly comforting Charlotte with 'Never mind,' and 'Lord Fitzjocelyn would not care,' till the storm lulled, Charlotte crept off to her room, and Isabel returned to the dinner-table.

'Well, what's the matter now?' said James.

'Poor Charlotte!' said Isabel, smiling; 'it seems that she trusted to making a grand appearance with the remains of yesterday's pudding, and that she was quite upset by the discovery that Ellen and Miss Catharine had been marauding on them.'

'You don't mean that Kitty has been eating that heavy pudding at this time of night?' cried James.

'Kitty eats everything,' was the placid answer, 'and I do not think we can blame Ellen, for she often comes down after our dinner to find something for the nursery supper.'

'Things go on in the most extraordinary manner,' muttered James.

'I suppose Charlotte misses Jane,' said Louis. 'She looks ill.'

'No wonder,' said James, 'she is not strong enough for such work. She has no method, and yet she is the only person who ever thinks of doing a thing properly. I wish your friend

Madison would come home and take her off our hands, for she is always alternating between fits of novel-reading and of remorse, in which she nearly works herself to death with running after lost time.'

'I should be sorry to part with her,' said Isabel; 'she is so quiet, and so fond of the children.'

'She will break down some day,' said James; 'if not before, certainly when she hears that Madison has a Peruvian wife.'

'There is no more to come,' said Isabel, rising; 'shall we come up-stairs?'

James took up the candles, and Louis followed, considerably hungry, and for once provoked by Isabel's serene certainty that nobody cared whether there were anything to eat. However, he had forgotten all by the time he came up-stairs, and began to deliver a message from Lady Conway, that she was going to write in a day or two to beg for a visit from Isabel during her sojourn at Estminster, a watering-place about thirty miles distant. Isabel's face lighted with pleasure. 'I could go?' she said, eagerly turning towards James.

'Oh, yes, if you wish it,' he answered, gruffly, as if vexed at her gratification.

'I mean, of course, if you can spare me,' she said, with an air of more reserve.

'If you wish it, go by all means. I hope you will.'

'The Christmas holidays are so near, that we may both go,' said Isabel; but James still had not recovered his equanimity, and Louis thought it best to begin talking of other things; and, turning to James, launched into the results of his Inglewood crops, and the grand draining plan which was to afford Marks-edge work for the winter, and in which his father had become much interested. But he did not find that ready heed to all that occupied him of which he used to be certain at the Terrace. Isabel cared not at all for farming, and took no part in 'mere country squire's talk;' and James was too much overburdened with troubles and anxieties to enter warmly into those of others. Of those to whom Louis's concerns had been as their own, one had been taken from him, the other two were far away; and the cold 'yes,' 'very good,' fell coldly on his ear.

The conversation reverted to the school; and here it appeared that two years' experience had taken away the freshness of novelty, and the cycle of disappointment had begun. More boys were quitting the school than the new-comers could balance; and James spoke with acute vexation of the impracticability of the boys, and the folly of the parents. The attendance at his evening lectures had fallen off; and he declared that there was a spirit of opposition to whatever he did. The boys disobeyed, knowing that they should be favoured at home, and if they were punished, the parents talked of complaints to the trustees. The Sunday teaching was treated as especially obnoxious; the genteel mothers talked ridiculously about its resembling a charity-

school ; the fathers did not care whether their sons went or not, and he had scarcely five boys who appeared there regularly ; and of them one was the butcher's son, who came rather in spite of his parents than with their consent. Attendance at church was more slack than ever ; and when he lectured the defaulters, and gave them additional tasks in the week, it was resented as an injustice. To crown all, Mr. Ramsbotham had called, and had been extremely insolent about a boy whose ears had been boxed for reading *Pickwick* in school, under cover of his Latin grammar ; and Isabel was almost indignant with Miss Faithfull for having ventured to hint to her that she wished Mr. Frost would be a little more gentle with the boys.

Isabel was fully alive now, and almost as vehement as her husband, in her complaints against his many foes. There was no lack of sympathy here ; indeed, there might be rather too much, for she did not afford the softening influence that James had hitherto found at home.

'Well, Jem,' said Louis, at last, 'I think you should keep your hands off the boys.'

'You are not bitten with the nonsense about personal dignity and corporal punishment?' said James.

'By no means. I have an infinite respect for the great institution of flogging ; but a solemn execution is one thing, a random stroke another.'

'Theories are very good things till you come to manage two score dunces without sense or honour. There is only one sort of appeal to their feelings that tells.'

'Maybe so ; but I have my doubts whether you are the man to make it.'

Louis was sorry he had so spoken, for a flush of pain came up in James's face at the remembrance of what Fitzjocelyn had long ago forgotten—a passionate blow given to deter him from a piece of wilful mischief, in which he was persisting for the mere amusement of provoking. It stood out among all other varieties of cuff, stroke, and knock, by the traces it had left, by Mrs. Frost's grief at it, and the forgiveness from the Earl ; and it had been the most humiliating distress of James's childhood. It humbled him even now, and he answered—

'You may be right, Louis ; I may be not sufficiently altered since I was a boy. I have struck harder than I intended more than once, and I have told the boys so.'

'I am sure, if they had any generosity, they would have been touched with your amends,' cried Isabel.

'After all, a schoolmaster's life does not tend to mend the temper,' concluded James, sighing, and passing his hand over his forehead.

No,' thought Louis ; 'nor does Isabel's mutton !'

CHAPTER XXXV

THE CONWAY HOUSEHOLD

And ye shall walk in silk attire,
 And siller hae to spare,
 Gin ye'll consent to be his bride,
 Nor think of Donald mair.—MISS BLAMIRE

'WHAT makes you so lame to-day?' asked Lord Ormersfield, as Louis crossed the library, on returning from an interview to which he had been summoned in another room.

'I only stumbled over an obstruction on the Frost staircase yesterday,' said Louis. 'Poor Jem chose to have me up to the nursery; and to see him in the paternal character is the funniest as well as the pleasantest spectacle the house affords.'

'Ah! it is not what it was,' said the Earl. 'I suppose I must call there before the holidays, though,' he added, reluctantly. 'But what did that man, Ramsbotham, want with you?'

'To ask our interest for that appointment for his friend Grant.'

'Indeed! what could bring him here?'

'Why, unluckily, he fancied he had some claim on me, on the score of Jem Frost's election. I was too innocent then to know what those things go for.'

'You may say so!' ejaculated the Earl. 'So he was insolent enough to bring that up, was he?'

'Worse,' said Fitzjocelyn; 'he wanted to threaten that, unless I would oblige him now, there were matters which it was his duty to lay before the trustees. I told him he would do, of course, whatever was his duty; whereupon he thought my lordship was interested in Mr. Frost.'

'Intolerably impertinent! I hope you set him down?'

'I told him that neither Mr. Frost nor I should wish him to pretermitt his duty on any consideration whatever. Then he harked back to what he did for us at the election; and I was forced to tell him that if he considered that he had thereby established a claim on me, I must own myself in his debt; but as to reciprocating it by putting in a person like Grant, that was against my conscience. He flew into a passion, informed me that Mr. Frost would take the consequences, mounted the British Lion, and I bowed him out upon that majestic quadruped, talking grandly of illiberal prejudices and the rising generation.'

'You acknowledged that he had a claim on you?'

'As things go in this world, I suppose it is true.'

'Louis! you will never know how to deal with those people.'

'I am afraid not. I could not, either boldly or diplomatically, get rid of the charge; so there was nothing for it but to confess. That's not the worst of it. I am afraid he really will be able to

take revenge on poor Jem, and I'm sure he can't afford to lose any more scholars.'

'Such a fellow as that will not have much in his power against James,' said Lord Ormersfield. 'What I am afraid of is, that you have cut the ground from under your feet. I cannot see how you are ever to stand for Northwold.'

'Nor I,' said Louis. 'In fact, father, I have always thought it most wonderfully kind forbearance that you never reproached me more for my doings on that occasion. I believe we were all too happy,' he presently added, with a sigh, which was re-echoed by his father, at the same time trying to say something about youthfulness, to which Louis, who had been leaning thoughtfully on the mantelpiece, presently answered—'How much wiser old people are than young! An original axiom, is not it? but it is the last which one learns!'

'You would hardly act in the same way now?' said his father.

'I wonder when it ever answers to interfere with the natural course of events!' responded Louis, musingly. 'There were two things that Mr. Calcott told me once upon a time.' Those two things he left unuttered. They were—that the gentleman would be wasted on the school, and that the lady was not made for a poor man's wife. No wonder they made him sigh; but he concluded by exclaiming aloud—'Well, I hope they will both go to Estminster, and come back with fresh life!'

The Estminster invitation was already on the road; but, unfortunately, Lady Conway had been unable to secure lodgings large enough to receive the children. She was urgent, however, that Isabel should come as soon as possible, since Louisa had been more unwell than usual, and was pining for her eldest sister; and she hoped that James would join her there as soon as the holidays should set him free.

James was hurt to find Isabel so much delighted to go, but resolved that she should not be deprived of the pleasure, and petulantly denied the offers, which became even entreaties, that she might wait till he could accompany her. He arranged, therefore, that he should follow her in a fortnight's time, the Miss Faithfulls undertaking the charge of their small namesakes; and Lady Conway wrote to fix a day when Delaford should come to take care of Isabel on her journey.

James and Isabel laughed at this measure. Mrs. James Frost was certainly not in circumstances to carry such a hero of the buttery in her suite; and Lady Conway herself had more sense than to have proposed it, but for Delaford's own representations. In fact, there was a pretty face at Dynevor Terrace, and he had been piqued enough by the return of his letters to be resolved on re-establishing his influence. Therefore did he demonstrate to my lady that the only appropriate trains would bring him to Northwold at seven in the evening, and take him and Mrs. James Frost Dynevor away at eleven next morning; and therefore did Isabel look up in a sudden

fit of recollection, as the breakfast was being removed, and say, 'Charlotte, Delaford is coming on Tuesday to fetch me to Westminster, and will sleep here that night.'

Isabel little guessed that in the days when she viewed the fantastic Viscount as her greatest enemy, the announcement of his approach would have been far less appalling to her.

'The wretch! the traitor! the vile deceiver!' thought Charlotte, not chary of her epithets, and almost ready to wreak her vengeance on the silver spoons. 'He has gone and broken poor Marianne's heart, and now he wants to treat me the same, and make me faithless to poor Tom, that is up in the mountain-tops and trusts to me! O me, what shall I do? Mrs. Beckett is gone, and there's no one to give me an advice! If I speak to him or scorn him, he'll take his advantage all alike—and his words are so fine and so soft, that do what I will to hate him when I'm away, he is sure to wind round me when he's there; and I can't get away, and I'm a poor, lonely, fatherless and motherless orphan, and a vain girl, that has listened already to his treacherous suit more than poor Tom would think for.' Charlotte worked on in much grief and perplexity for some minutes, revolving the vanity that had led to her follies, and humbling herself in her own eyes. Suddenly, a flash of thought crossed her, and woke a smile upon her face, almost a look of mischief. She tied on a clean apron, and running up-stairs, opened the drawing-room door, and said, 'If you please, ma'am, might I ask Miss Faithfull's Martha to tea on Tuesday night?'

'Oh yes, if you like,' said Isabel, never raising her eyes from the rebuilding of the ruined chapel in the valley.

Away skipped Charlotte, and in two minutes was at the back door of the House Beautiful. Mrs. Martha had been grimly kind to her ever since she had been afflicted with the cook for a fellow-servant, and received her only with a reproof for coming gadding out, when she ought to be hard at work; but when she heard the invitation she became wrathful—she had rather go ten miles out of her way than even look at 'that there Ford.'

But Charlotte explained her purpose, and implored, and put her in mind that Mrs. Beckett was gone, and she had no protector; and Martha relented, told her that if she had minded her she would never have been in the scrape at all, but agreed, not without satisfaction, to afford Mr. Delaford the society of his old acquaintance.

And so when Mr. Delaford, with his whiskers freshly curled and his boots in a state of fascinating polish, walked up Dynevor Terrace, the door was opened by Ellen, and the red-faced cook and the upright Mrs. Martha sat on either side the fire. Daintily did he greet them, and stand warming himself before the fire, adapting his conversation to them for the next ten minutes, before he ventured to ask whether Miss Arnold were still an inmate. 'Taking out dinner—taking in tea,' gruffly replied Martha.

Mr. Delaford waited, but Ellen only ran in for one moment to fetch the kettle, and Martha discoursed as usual on the gold mines in Peru. By and by, when the parlour tea could by no possibility be supposed to be farther prolonged, there swept into the kitchen the stately nurse. Charlotte had run up to the nursery, and begged as a favour that she might be left to watch the children, while Mrs. Nurse entertained Mr. Delaford below-stairs; and in pity to so grand a gentleman, constrained to mix with such 'low servants,' the nurse had yielded, and Charlotte sat safe and sound by the nursery fire, smiling at his discomfiture, and reading over Tom's letters with an easier conscience than for many a day.

Mr. Delaford was too much of a gentleman to be uncivil to the three dames by the kitchen fire, but he watched every step and every creaking door. He even went the length of coming up to family prayers, in hopes of there meeting Charlotte; but she only joined the procession at the parlour door, and had flown up-stairs, like a little bird, before he was out again.

The gentleman was affronted, and resolved to make her feel it. They could not but meet at the kitchen breakfast, and he barely acknowledged her. This was the most trying stroke of all, for it set her, in the eyes of the cook and nurse, on a level with the inferior servants, to whom he would not have deigned a look, and it was not easy to resist showing that she was on more familiar terms with him than all. But the instinct of self-protection and the wisdom of sincerity came to her aid. She abstained from raising her eyes to his face, from one conscious word or glance; she locked herself into her pantry when she took down the breakfast things, and avoided every encounter, even when she had begun to feel that it would have been more flattering had he made more efforts. At last, dire necessity obliged her to accept his aid in carrying her mistress's box down the stairs. He walked backwards, she forwards. She would not meet his eye, and he was too well-bred for one word on the stairs; but in the garden he exclaimed, 'Miss Arnold, what have I done?'

'I never ought to have listened to you,' said Charlotte. 'It was not right by neither of us; so please say no more.'

'If you could understand—'

'I don't want to understand nothing.'

Charlotte drove him on with the box till they were close to the fly, and then, leaving him and the man to adjust the packing, flew back to announce that all was ready for her mistress. The last kisses were given to the children, and a message left with Charlotte for her master, who was in school; then she stood with Miss Catharine in her arms, and saw the fly drive off.

'Well,' said Mrs. Cook, 'that butler thinks himself a great beau, no doubt! I asked him whether he thought you pretty, Charlotte, and he said you hadn't no air nor no complexion. It's as I tells you—nobody will never take no notice of you while you goes about so dowdy.'

Charlotte did not know whether she was glad that the cook could not tease her about Delaford, or mortified to be supposed beneath his notice. No air, forsooth ! She who had often heard it said that she looked like any lady !

‘But oh,’ said Charlotte to herself, as she spent her daily five minutes at noonday in quiet thought, ‘am I not a poor silly thing not to be thankful that care has been round me this time, and that I have not been let to do nothing giddy nor false by Tom, whatever I may have thought !’

Meanwhile, Isabel had found it much harder to part with her babies for three weeks than it had seemed at the first proposal ; and there were tears in her eyes as she gazed at the peaked, red-tiled roof of the old grammar-school, and reckoned the days and hours before her husband would join her.

Other associations revived when she found herself at Estminster, and was received with shrieks of joy, caresses, and exclamations too fond and foolish to bear repetition ; and then the pale Louisa rested against her, stroking her hand, and Lady Conway fondled her, and Virginia, looking formed and handsome, retreated a little way to study her and declare that she was the same Isabel, neither altered nor grown older—it was all a dream that she had ever left them.

She almost felt it so herself, so entirely did she fit into the old habits, the little quiet dinner (only it seemed unusually good), the subsequent closing round the fire with the addition of Miss King and Louisa, the easy desultory chat, the books with Mudie’s stamp lying about, the music which must be practised. It was very like being Miss Conway still ; and when she awoke the next morning to find it late, and to the impulse of hurrying up, or *not* hurrying, expecting to find James making breakfast himself, and cross at being made late for school, she turned on her pillow, half doubting whether she had dreamt these two years in one long night, and remembering that captive mermaid, who had but to resume her maritime headgear and return to her native element, to forget the very existence of her fisherman husband and children. No ! Isabel was not come to that ! but she was almost ashamed to enjoy her extra hour’s repose ; and then the leisurely breakfast—nay, even the hot rolls and clear coffee were appreciated ; and she sighed as she called up the image of the breakfast over an hour ago, the grim kettle, the bad butter, the worse fire, and James, cold and hurried, with Kitty on his knee gnawing a lump of crust. It was a contrast to Lady Conway reading her letters and discussing engagements with comfortable complacency, and Virginia making suggestions, and Louisa’s grave bright eyes consulting hers, and Miss King quietly putting in a remark, and the anticipation of Walter’s return, as if he were the only person wanting.

The sisters always resented their mother’s habit of talking of ‘poor Isabel,’ regarding her as the happiest of women ; and they

were confirmed in their belief by seeing her looking exceedingly well and handsome, with perhaps a little more dignity and a sweeter smile. Virginia loved to snatch private interviews with Miss King, to express her confidence in dear Isabel's felicity, in the infallibility and other perfections of James, and in the surpassing cleverness of little Catharine; and Louisa was always sighing to behold the twins. But, to the delight of the schoolroom, the *Chapel in the valley* was produced in a complete form, and a very pretty romance it was; but the hermit and the brilliant *dénouement* were quite a shock to the young ladies, just when their tears were prepared, and Virginia was almost angry.

'Oh, my dear, there is trouble enough in the world!' said Isabel; 'Hubert and Adeline have been my companions so long, that at least I must leave them happy.'

'Indeed,' said Miss King, 'I am almost surprised that you have been able to finish them at all, with so much re-writing.'

To her surprise, Isabel blushed, and her answer partook of self-defence. 'James is so busy, and the children so young, that this has been my great resource. When my little girls are older, I must begin educating in earnest. I want to talk over Madame Neckar's book with you, Miss King.'

'All systems begin alike from infant obedience, I believe,' said the governess.

'Yes,' said Isabel, 'little Catharine is obedience itself with us. It is curious to see how well she knows the difference between us and the nurses. There are great tempests up-stairs, and her papa takes them very much to heart. He always has her down-stairs when he is at home; and he has accustomed her to so much attention, that there is no doing anything while she is by, or I would have her more with me.'

The self-justifying tone rather puzzled Miss King. She noted likewise that Isabel was backward in entering into details of her home life, and that she never said a word to encourage her sister's wishes to visit her at Northwold. Knowing Isabel as the governess did, she was sure that she would not merely talk of things on the surface, if her spirit were fully content. Only once did she go any deeper, and that was as she took up a little book of religious poetry of which she had been very fond. 'Ah!' she said, 'I don't feel these things as I used. I think practical life dulls one.'

'I should have said, practical life made things real,' said Miss King.

Isabel had not found out that having duties and not doing them was less practical than having no particular task.

Another cloud of mystery was over the relations with Mr. Dynevor and Clara. Isabel baffled all Lady Conway's inquiries and advice by entering into no particulars, but adhering to her own version of the matter, 'that Mr. Dynevor had required of James conditions incompatible with his duty;' and not deigning

to explain either duty or conditions, as beyond the capacity of her hearer.

Of Clara no account was vouchsafed, except that Isabel believed she was abroad; 'they had been very much disappointed in her,' and Isabel was afraid that she was a good deal altered; and the subject seemed so painful, that Virginia did not venture to push her inquiries any farther.

The great subject of interest in the Conway family was that Virginia and Louisa were going to lose their maid; and the suggestion somehow arose that Charlotte should be her successor. It was agreed on all hands that nature had formed her for a lady's-maid, and a few lessons from a hairdresser would make her perfection; and she would be invaluable in reading to Louisa when restless and unable to sleep.

Isabel gave herself credit for the most notable arrangement she had ever made—promoting the little maiden, whom she really liked, and relieving herself from the constant annoyance about sparing Ellen from the nursery by obtaining a stronger housemaid. She had only a few scruples, or rather she knew that James would have some, as to exposing Charlotte to Delaford's attentions after what she had heard in Clara's letter; but the least hint on this score led to a panegyric upon Delaford's perfections—his steadiness, his prudence, his cleverness on journeys, his usefulness in taking care of Walter. 'I know that Walter is safe when he is with Delaford,' said Lady Conway. And even the sensible Miss King observed, smiling, 'that there always *would* be nonsense between men and maid-servants; and there were many more dangerous places than the present. She would watch over Charlotte, and Fanshawe was quite to be trusted.'

The Conway family knew rather less about their own servants' hall than they did of feudal establishments five hundred years ago.

Still, Isabel, in her superior prudence, resolved to consult Fanshawe on the true state of affairs. Fanshawe was a comfortable portly personage, chiefly absorbed in her caps and her good cheer, and faring smoothly through life, on the principle of always saying what was expected of her, and never seeing anything to anybody's disadvantage.

She assured Mrs. James Frost that she did not think Delaford to blame; many girls would be foolish about a man with personal advantages, but she could not see it was his fault. Poor Marianne had been always weakly; and, 'After all, ma'am, some young women will put constructions upon anything,' said Mrs. Fanshawe, deciding that at least she should make no mischief by sacrificing poor Marianne.

Isabel did not like to come to more individual inquiries, lest she should prepare discomfort for Charlotte; but she easily satisfied herself that all was as right as convenient, and having occasion to write some orders to Charlotte, communicated the proposal, saying that all should be settled on her return.

There was wild work in the brain of the poor little Lady of Eschalott. No more stairs to scrub! No more mats to shake! No more hurrying after lost time, and an uneasy remembrance of undone duties! No more hardening of fingers, no more short-sleeved lilac, no more vulgarities from the cook! Lady-like dress, high wages, work among flowers and gauzes, reading to Miss Louisa, housekeeper's-room society, rank as 'Arnold' or 'Miss Arnold!' How much more suitable to the betrothed of the Superintendent at San Benito! To be sure, she was aware that a serpent lurked among the flowers; but she had shown him a bit of her mind once, and she found she could take care of herself, and keep him at a distance.

With her eyes shut, she already beheld Jane Beckett meeting her, when seated at the back of a carriage, with a veil and a parasol, addressing her as a grand lady, and kissing and praising her when she found her little Charlotte after all.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE TRUSTEES' MEETING

Know you not, master, to some kind of men
Their graces serve them but as enemies?—*As You Like It*

'My lord,' said Frampton, entering the library late one evening, in visible perturbation, and addressing himself to Fitzjocelyn, 'there is a person wishing to see you.'

'What person at this time of night?' said Louis.

'In fact, my lord,' said the butler, hesitating, 'it is the young person at Mr. Frost's.'

'Something must be the matter!' cried Louis, starting up.

'She would explain nothing to me, she insisted on seeing your lordship; and—in fact—she was in such a state of agitation that I left her with Mrs. Bowles.'

Louis lost no time in hurrying into the hall. Charlotte must have followed Frampton without his knowledge, for she was already there; and, springing with clasped hands towards Fitzjocelyn, she cried, sobbing, 'My lord, my lord, come to master!'

'Is he ill? or the children?'

'No, no! but he'll be off—he'll be off like poor Tom!' exclaimed Charlotte, between her gasps; 'but I've locked it!' and she waved a door-key, and seemed about to laugh hysterically.

'Sit down, Charlotte,' said Louis, authoritatively, bringing a chair. 'If you do not explain yourself reasonably at once, I shall call Mrs. Bowles, and desire her to put you to bed.'

She made an imploring gesture, sank trembling into the chair, and, after a few incoherent efforts, managed to speak—'If you would but come to master, my lord—I know it is something bad.'

Louis thought it wisest to despatch Frampton at once to order the carriage to be brought out immediately ; and this so far pacified Charlotte, that she could speak comprehensibly on the cause of her alarm. 'He is in such a way !' she began. 'He went out to the school-examination, I believe, in his cap and gown, this morning ; he was gone all day, but just at dusk I heard him slam-to the front door, fit to shake the house down, like he does when he is put out. I'd a thought nothing of that ; but by and by I heard him stamping up and down the study, like one in a frenzy, and I found his cap and gown lying all of a heap in a corner of the hall. Then, Mr. Calcott came to call ; and when I went into the study, master had his head down on the table, and wouldn't see no one ; he fairly stamped to me to be gone, and bring him no more messages. Mr. Calcott, he looked so sorry and concerned, and sent in again. I was to say that he hoped some arrangement might be made, if Mr. Frost would only see him ; but master had locked the door, and hallooed out that I was to say he was obliged, but couldn't see nobody. So Mr. Calcott was forced to go ; and there was poor master. Not one morsel of dinner has he had. I knocked, but he would not open, only said he did not want for nothing. No, not even when 'twas time for Miss Catharine to come down. She thumped at the door, and called "Papa" so pretty ; but he never heeded, except to call out, "Take her away !"' Charlotte was crying so much, that she could hardly proceed. 'Then I knew it must be something very melancholy indeed. But by and by he opens the door with a great jerk, and runs right up to the lumber-room. I saw his face, and 'twas like a corpse, my lord ; and he brings down his portmanteau into his dressing-room, and I hears him pulling out all his drawers. "He'll be gone !" I thinks, "he'll be off to America, too ! And my poor mistress !" So I went up quietly, and in secret, unbeknown to them all, and got my bonnet ; and I've run every step of the way—for you are the only one, my lord, as can soothe his wounded spirit ; and I've locked both the doors, and here's the key, so he can't be gone till you come.'

'Locked the doors !' cried Louis. 'What have you done ? Suppose your mistress or Miss Clara were ill ?'

'Oh, no—no, it is not that,' said Charlotte ; 'or why should he flee from the face of his children ? Why, I took Miss Salome up to the top of the stairs, when she was screaming and crying with all her might, and you would not have thought he was within a mile of her. No, my lord, no one can't do nothing but you.'

'I'll come at once,' said Louis. 'You did quite right to fetch me ; but it was a frightful thing to lock the door.'

Sending Charlotte to the housekeeper, he went to communicate her strange intelligence to his father, who shared his dismay so much as almost to wish to come with him to Northwold ; but Louis felt he could deal better alone with James.

His fears took the direction of the Italian travellers, knowing that any misfortune to them must recoil on James with double agony after such a parting.

In very brief space the carriage was at Northwold, and desiring that it should wait at the corner of the Terrace, Louis followed Charlotte, who had jumped down from the box, and hastened forward to unlock the door; and he was in time to hear the angry, though suppressed, greeting that received her. 'Pretty doings, ma'am! So I have caught you out at last, though you did think to lock me in! He shan't come in! I wonder at your impudence! The very front door!'

'Oh, cook, don't!' The poor breathless voice managed at last to be heard. 'This is Lord Fitzjocelyn.'

Cook had vanished out of sight or hearing before Louis's foot was within the threshold.

The study door was open, the fire expiring, the books and papers pushed back; and James's fierce, restless tread was heard pacing vehemently about his own room. Louis ran hastily up, and entered at once. His cousin stood staring with wild eyes; his hair was tossed and tangled, his face lividly pale, and the table was strewn with fragments of letters, begun and torn up again; his clothes lay tumbled in disorder on the floor, where his portmanteau lay open and partly packed. All Louis's worst alarm seemed fulfilled at once. 'What has happened?' he cried, catching hold of both James's hands, as if to help him to speak. 'Who is ill?—not Clara?'

'No—no one is ill,' said James, withdrawing his hands, and kneeling down by his box, with an air of feigned indifference; 'I am only going to London.'

'To London?'

'Aye, to see what is to be done,—ship-chaplaincy, curacy, literature, selling sermons at five shillings each,—what not. I am no longer master of Northwold school!' He strove to speak carelessly, but bending over his packet, thrust down the clothes with desperate blows.

Louis sat down, too much dismayed to utter a word.

'One morning's work in the conclave,' said James, with the same assumed ease. 'Here's their polite reprimand, which they expected me to put up with,—censuring all my labour, forbidding Sunday-classes, accusing me of partiality and cruelty, with a lot of nonsense about corporal punishment and dignity. I made answer, that if I were master at all, I must be at liberty to follow my own views, otherwise I would resign; and, would you believe it, they snapped at the offer—they thought it highly desirable! There's an end of it.'

'Impossible!' cried Louis, casting his eye over the reprimand, and finding that the expressions scarcely warranted James's abstract of them. 'You must have mistaken!'

'Do you doubt *that*?' and James threw to him a sheet where, in Richardson's clerkly handwriting, the trustees of King

Edward's Northwold Grammar School formally accepted the resignation of the Reverend James Roland Frost Dynevor.

'They cannot be so hasty! Did not Mr. Calcott call to see you?'

'An old humbug!'

'I'll go and see him this instant. Something may be done.'

'No,' said James, holding him down by the shoulder, 'I will not be degraded by vain solicitations.'

'This must be that wretched Ramsbotham!' exclaimed Louis.

'Oh, Jem! I little thought he had so much power to injure you.'

'It is as well you did not,' said James. 'It would have made no difference, except in the pain it would have cost you; and the only gratification in this business is, that I suffer because neither you nor I would deny our principles. I thank you, Fitzjocelyn!' and he straightened himself in the satisfaction of persecuted rectitude.

'You have very little to thank me for,' said Louis, wringing his hand, and turning aside, as if unable yet to face the full extent of the evil.

'Never fear for us,' continued James, boldly; 'we shall struggle on. *Mens conscia*,—you see I can't forget to be a schoolmaster.'

'But what are you about? Where are you going?'

'To London. You spoke to a publisher about my lectures on history; they will serve for introduction. He may make me his hack—a willing one, while I advertise—apply for anything. I must be gone!'

'You do not look fit for a night journey. You would be too early at Estminster to see Isabel.'

'Don't name her!' cried James, starting round as if the word were a dart. 'Thank Heaven that she is away! I must write to her. Maybe, Lady Conway will keep her till I am settled—till I have found some lodging in London where no one will know us.'

'And where you may run up a comfortable doctor's bill.'

With a gesture—half passion, half despair—James reiterated, 'There's no staying here. I *must* be gone. I must be among strangers.'

'Your *mens conscia* would better prove that it has no cause for shame by staying here, instead of rushing out of sight into the human wilderness, and sacrificing those poor little—'

James struck his foot on the floor, as though to intercept the word; but Louis continued, apparently unmoved by his anger—'Those poor little children. If misfortune and injury be no disgrace to the injured, I call it cowardly pride to fly off by night to hide yourself, instead of living in your own house, like an honest man.'

'Live!—pray what am I to live on?' cried James, laughing hoarsely.

'You will not find out by whirling to London in your present state.'

In fact, Louis's most immediate care was to detain him for that one night. There was a look of coming illness about him, and his desperate, maddened state of mind might obscure his judgment, and urge him into some precipitate measure, such as he might afterwards rue bitterly for the sake of the wife and children, the bare thought of whom seemed at present to sting him so intolerably. Moreover, Louis had a vague hope that so harsh a proceeding would be abandoned by the trustees; his father would remonstrate, and James might be able to think and to apologize. He was hardly a rational being to-night, and probably would have driven away any other companion; but long habit, and external coolness, enabled Louis to stand his ground, and to protract matters, till the clock, striking eleven, relieved him, as much as it exasperated James, by proving it so late that the last train would have already passed.

He persisted in declaring that he should go by the first in the morning, and Louis persuaded him to go to bed, after Charlotte had brought them some tea, which, he said, choked him. Deciding on sleeping at No. 5, Louis sent home the carriage, with a note to his father; and Charlotte pressed her hands together in a transport of gratitude when she found that he was not going to abandon her master. She did her best to make the forlorn house comfortable; but it was but cold comfort, with all the fires gone out, and he was too sad and anxious to heed it.

She was at his door early the next morning, with a summons more alarming than surprising. She was sure that master was very ill.

There was James lying across his bed, half-dressed, turned away from the dim morning light, and more frightfully pale than ever. He started angrily at Louis's entrance, and sprang up, but fell back, insisting with all his might that nothing ailed him but a common headache, which needed only to be left quiet for an hour or two. He said it venomously.

'A very uncommon headache,' thought Louis. 'My belief is, that it is little short of brain fever! If I could only feel his pulse! But it would be very like taking a mad dog's hand. There's nothing for it but to fetch old Walby. He may have some experience of refractory patients.'

'Go home, Louis,' reiterated James, savagely, on opening his eyes and finding him not gone. 'I tell you I want nobody. I shall be in London before night.'

And starting up, he tried to draw the curtain at his feet, to shut out the tardy dawn; but too giddy to persevere, he sank back after one noisy pull.

Louis drew it completely, shaded the window, and would have settled the pillows, but was not allowed; and obtaining an impatient grunt by way of dismissal, he ran down-stairs, caught up hat and stick, and set off to summon Mr. Walby from his comfortable family breakfast-table.

The good old doctor was more concerned than amazed. He could hardly surmount the shock to his trustee conscience, on hearing of the consequence of yesterday's proceedings.

'I was much grieved at the time,' he said, as they walked to the Terrace together. 'You will believe me that I was no willing party, my lord.'

'I could never believe that you would do anything hard towards any one, Mr. Walby,' said Louis, kindly; and a few more like assurances led the old man to volunteer the history of the case in confidence.

Ramsbotham had brought before the meeting of the trustees a serious mass of charges, on which he founded a motion that Mr. Frost should be requested to resign. Every one rejected such a measure, and the complaints were sifted. Some were palpably false, others exaggerated, others related to matters of principle; but deducting these, it still was proved that the Sunday attendance and evening lectures were too visibly the test of his favour, and that the boys were sometimes treated with undue severity, savouring of violent temper. 'I must confess, my lord,' said Mr. Walby, sinking his voice, 'I am afraid Mr. Frost is too prompt with his hand. A man does not know how hard he hits, when he knocks a boy over the ears with a book. Mrs. Barker's little boy really had a gathering under the ear in consequence;—I saw it myself.'

Louis was confounded; he had nothing to say to this; he knew the force that irritation gave to James's hand too well to refuse his credence, and he could only feel shame and dismay, as if himself guilty by his misjudged patronage.

Mr. Walby proceeded to say that, under the circumstances, the trustees had decided on remonstrating by letter, after the examination; and it was easy to perceive that the reprimand, which might have been wise and moderate from the Squire, had gained a colour from every one concerned, so as to censure what was right and aggravate what was wrong. Mr. Frost's reply had been utterly unexpected; Ramsbotham and the bookseller had caught at the resignation, and so did the butcher, who hated the schoolmaster for having instilled inconveniently high principles into his son. Richardson abstained from voting; Mr. Calcott fought hard for Mr. Frost, but the grocer was ill, and only poor old Mr. Walby supported him, and even they felt that their letter had not deserved such treatment. Alas! had not Fitzjocelyn himself taught Northwold that the Squire was not a dictator? Even then, Mr. Calcott, still hoping that an apology might retrieve the day, had set forth to argue the matter with James Frost, whom he could not suppose serious in his intentions, but thought he meant to threaten the trustees into acquiescence. The doors had been closed against him, and Mr. Walby feared that now the step was known, it was too late to retract it. 'The ladies would never allow it,' he declared; 'there was no saying how virulent they were against Mr. Frost;

and as to consideration for his family, that rather inflamed their dislike. They had rich relations enough ! It would be only too good for so fine a lady to be brought down.' Every one had some story of her pride, neglect, or bad housewifery. 'And I can tell you,' said Mr. Walby, 'that I am not in their good books for declaring that I never saw anything from her but very pretty, affable manners.'

With these words they reached the house ; and with sighs and murmurs of 'Ah ! poor young man !' Mr. Walby followed Louis to the landing-place, where they both paused, looking at each other in doubt how to effect an entrance, Louis suddenly remembering that no presence would be more intolerable to the patient than that of a trustee. However, there was nothing for it but to walk in, and announce, as a matter of course, that he had thought it right to call in Mr. Walby.

The extremity of displeasure brought James to his feet, and out into the passage, saying, with grave formality, that he was much obliged, and glad to see Mr. Walby as a friend, but Lord Fitzjocelyn was mistaken in thinking him in need of his advice. Many thanks, he would trouble him no further ; and affecting a laugh, he said that Fitzjocelyn seemed never to have heard of a bad headache.

'Acting does not mend matters, Jem,' said Louis. 'You had much better confess how really ill you are.'

Excessive giddiness made James stagger against his cousin, and Louis, throwing his arms round him, looked in great alarm to the doctor for help, but was answered by something very like a smile. 'Aye, aye, sir, there's nothing for it but to go to bed. If his lordship there had seen as many cases of jaundice as I have, he would not look so frightened. Very wholesome disorder ! Yes, lie down, and I'll send you a thing or two to take.'

So saying, Mr. Walby helped Louis to lay their unwilling invalid on the bed without much resistance or reply, and presently departed, so infinitely relieved that he could not help indulging in a little chuckle at the young Viscount's mistake. As soon as he was gone, James revived enough to protest that it was all nonsense, doctors must needs give a name to everything ; if they would only let him alone, he should be himself and off to London in two hours ; and that it was Fitzjocelyn himself who was looking excessively ill, and as yellow as a guinea. He would not hear of undressing and going absolutely to bed, and fairly scolded every one out of sight. Good Miss Mercy, who had trotted in at the tidings of illness, stood at the nursery-door, telegraphing signs of commiseration in answer to Louis's looks of perplexity.

'At least,' she said, 'you had better come to breakfast with us, and hear what my sister says—Salome always knows what is best.'

He soon found himself in the snug parlour, where the small round breakfast-table, drawn close to Miss Faithfull's fireside

chair, had a sort of doll's-house air of cheerful comfort, with the tiny plates, tea-cups, and the miniature loaf, and the complicated spider-legs, among which it was not easy to dispose of his own length of limb.

The meal passed in anxious consultation. There might be no danger, but the disorder was severe and increasing. James's health had long been suffering from harass of mind, want of exercise, and unwholesome diet; and the blow of the previous day had brought things to a crisis. There he lay, perfectly unmanageable, permitting neither aid nor consolation, unable to endure the sight of any one, and too much stupefied by illness to perceive the impracticability of his wild scheme of seeking employment in London.

Miss Faithfull pronounced that either Mercy or Lord Fitzjocelyn must go and fetch Mrs. James Frost home.

'I was only thinking how long we could keep her away,' said Louis. 'Pray don't be shocked, dear Miss Mercy, but I thought I could nurse poor Jem much better alone than with another dead weight on our hands.'

'They would neither of them thank you,' said Miss Faithfull, laughing. 'Depend upon it, she will know best how to deal with him.'

'Well, you see more of their household than I do, but I have never dared to think of her! Do you remember the words, "if thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee—"'

'There are some people who can run with the horsemen better than with the footmen,' said Miss Salome. 'You know we are very fond of young Mrs. Frost. We cannot forget her sweetness when she lived in this house, and she has always been most kind and friendly. I do believe that to display the most admirable qualities, she only needs to be roused.'

'To live in the house with Jem, and Jem's three babies, and yet want rousing!'

'I have thought,' said Salome, diffidently, 'that he was only too gentle with her.'

'Do you know how very severe you are growing, Miss Faithfull?' said Louis, looking her in the face, in the gravity of amusement.

'I mean,' said Miss Faithfull, blushing, 'though of course I do not know, that I have fancied it might be better for both if he could have gone to the root of the matter, and set fairly before her the prime duties requisite in the mistress of such a family. He may have done so.'

'I think not,' said Louis; 'it would be awkward when a woman fancied she embraced poverty voluntarily for his sake. Poverty! It was riches compared with their present condition. Isabel on 150*l.* a year! It may well make poor Jem ill to think about it! I only wonder it is not a brain-fever!'

'Lord Fitzjocelyn regrets that brain-fever,' said Miss Faithfull.

'Probably my ideas on the subject are derived from the prevalence of the complaint in light literature,' said Louis, smiling. 'It would be more dignified, and suit Isabel better. Poor Isabel! I hope I have done her injustice. She behaved gloriously at the barricades, and has a great soul after all; but I had begun to think heroines not calculated for moderate circumstances. May they do better in no circumstances at all! Heighho! how a heavy heart makes one talk nonsense! So I am to fetch the poor thing home, Miss Faithfull.'

This was determined on, whether with or without James's consent; Miss Mercy undertaking that she and Martha would help Charlotte, and dispose of the children in the House Beautiful; and she went back with Louis to fetch them, when little Catharine was found peeping through the bars of her prison-gate at the top of the nursery-stairs, shouting lustily for papa. She graciously accepted her godfather as a substitute, and was carried by him to her kind neighbour's house, already a supplementary home. As to her father, Louis found him more refractory than ever. His only greeting was, 'Why are not you gone home?' He scorned Mr. Walby's prescriptions, and made such confident assertions that he should be off to London in the evening, that Fitzjocelyn almost reverted to the brain-fever theory, and did not venture to hint his intention to any one but Charlotte, telling her that he should now almost think her justified in locking the doors.

Sending information to his father, he started for Estminster, very disconsolate, and full of self-reproach for the hasty proceedings which had borne such bitter fruits. The man and the situation had been an injustice to each other; a sensitive irritable person was the very last to be fit for a position requiring unusual judgment and temper, where his energy had preyed upon itself. His being placed there had been the work of Louis's own impetuous scorn of the wisdom of elder and graver heads. Such regrets derived additional poignancy from the impossibility of conferring direct assistance upon James, and from the degree of justice in the hard measure which had been dealt to him, would make it for ever difficult to recommend him; and yet the devising future schemes for his welfare was the refuge which Louis's mind most willingly sought from the present perplexity of the communication in store for poor Isabel.

As he put out his head at the Estminster station, a familiar voice shouted, 'Hollo! Fitzjocelyn, how jolly! Have you got James there? I told Isabel it would be no use; but when she did not get a letter this morning, she would have it that he was coming, and got me to walk up with her.'

'Where is she?' asked Louis, as he jumped out and shook hands with Walter.

'Walking up and down the esplanade. She would not come into the station, so I said I would run up to satisfy her. I don't know what she will say to you for not being Frost.'

‘Do you mean that she is anxious?’

‘It is the correct thing, isn’t it, when wives get away from their husbands, and have not the fragment of a letter for twenty-four whole hours? But what do you mean, Fitzjocelyn?’ asked the boy, suddenly sobering. ‘Is anything really the matter?’

‘Yes, Walter,’ said Louis; ‘we must tell your sisters as best we can. James is ill, and I am come for her.’

Walter was silent for a few minutes, then drew a sigh, saying, ‘Poor Isabel, I wish it had not been! These were the only comfortable holidays I have had since she chose to marry.’

Isabel here came in sight, quickening her pace as she first saw that her brother had a companion, but slackening in disappointment when she perceived that it was not her husband; then the next moment hurrying on, and as she met them, exclaiming, ‘Tell me at once! What is it?’

‘Nothing serious,’ said Louis. ‘The children are all well, but I left James very uncomfortable, though with nothing worse than a fit of jaundice.’

The inexperienced Isabel hardly knew whether this were not as formidable as even the cherished brain-fever; and becoming very pale, she said, ‘I am ready at once—Walter will let mamma know.’

‘There will be no train for two hours,’ said Louis. ‘You will have plenty of time to prepare.’

‘You should have telegraphed,’ said Isabel; ‘I could have come by the first train.’

Trembling, she grasped Walter’s arm, and began hastening home, impatient to be doing something. ‘I knew something was wrong,’ she exclaimed; ‘I ought to have gone home yesterday, when there was no letter.’

‘Indeed, there was nothing the matter yesterday, at least with his health,’ said Louis. ‘You are alarming yourself far too much—’

‘To be sure, Isabel,’ chimed in Walter. ‘A fellow at my tutor’s had it, and did nothing but wind silkworm’s silk all the time. We shall have James yet to spend Christmas with us. Everybody laughs at the jaundice, though Fitzjocelyn does look so lugubrious that he had almost frightened *me*.’

‘Is this true?’ said Isabel, looking from one to the other, as if she had been frightened in vain.

‘Quite true, Isabel,’ said Walter. ‘Never mind Fitzjocelyn’s long face; I wouldn’t go if I were you! Don’t spoil the holidays.’

‘I must go, Walter dear,’ said Isabel, ‘but I do not think Lord Fitzjocelyn would play with my fears. Either he is very ill, or something else is wrong.’

‘You have guessed it, Isabel,’ said Louis. ‘This illness is partly the effect of distress of mind.’

‘That horrid meeting of trustees!’ cried Isabel. ‘I am sure they have been impertinent.’

'They objected to some of his doings; he answered by threatening to resign, and I am sorry to say that the opposition set prevailed to have his resignation accepted.'

'A very good thing too,' cried Sir Walter. 'I always thought that school a shabby concern. To be under a lot of butchers and bakers, and nothing but cads among the boys! He ought to be heartily glad to be rid of the crew.'

Isabel's indignation was checked by a sort of melancholy amusement at her brother's view; but Louis doubted whether she realized the weight of her own words as she answered—'Unfortunately, Walter, it is nearly all we have to live upon.'

'So much the better,' continued Walter. 'I'll tell you—you shall all go to Thornton Conway, and I'll come and spend my holidays there, instead of kicking my heels at these stupid places. I shan't mind your babies a bit, and Frost may call himself my tutor if he likes. I don't care if you take me away from Eton.'

'A kind scheme, Walter,' said Isabel, 'but wanting in two important points, mamma's consent and James's.'

'Oh, I'll take care of mamma!'

'I'm afraid I can't promise the same as to James.'

'Ah! I see. Delaford was quite right when he said Mr. Frost was a gentleman who never knew what was for his own advantage.'

As they arrived at the house, Isabel desired to know how soon she must be ready, and went up-stairs. Walter detained his cousin—'I say, Fitzjocelyn, have they really got nothing to live on?'

'No more than will keep them from absolute want.'

'I shall take them home,' said Walter, with much satisfaction. 'I shall write to tell James that there is nothing else to be done. I cannot do without Isabel, and I'll make my mother consent.'

Fitzjocelyn was glad to be freed from the boy on any terms, and to see him go off to write his letter.

Walter was at least sincere and warm-hearted in his selfishness, and so more agreeable than his mother, whom Louis found much distressed, under the secret conviction that something might be expected of her. 'Poor Isabel! I wish she could come to me; but so many of them—and we without a settled home. If there were no children—but London houses are so small; and, indeed, it would be no true kindness to let them live in our style for a little while. They must run to expenses in dress; it would be much more economical at home, and I could send Walter to them if he is very troublesome.'

'Thank you,' said Louis. 'I think James will be able to ride out the storm independently.'

'I know that would be his wish. And I think I heard that Mr. Dynevor objected to the school. That might be one obstacle removed.'

Lady Conway comforted herself by flourishing on into predictions that all would now be right, and that poor dear Isabel would soon be a much richer woman than herself; while Louis listened to the castle-building, not thinking it worth while to make useless counter-prophecies.

The sisters were up-stairs, assisting Isabel, and they all came down together. The girls were crying; but Isabel's dark, soft eyes, and noble head, had an air of calm, resolute elevation, which drove all Louis's misgivings away, and which seemed quite beyond and above the region of Lady Conway's caresses and affectionate speeches. Walter and Virginia came up to the station, and parted with their sister with fondness that was much more refreshing, Walter reiterating that his was the only plan.

'Now, Fitzjocelyn,' said Isabel, when they were shut into a *coupé*, 'tell me what you said about distress of mind. It has haunted me whether you used those words.'

'Could you doubt his distress at such a state of affairs?'

'I thought there could be no distress of mind where the suffering is for the truth.'

'Ah! if he could quite feel it so!'

'What do you mean? There has been a cabal against James from the first to make him lay aside his principles, and I cannot regret his refusal to submit to improper dictation, at whatever cost to myself.'

'I am afraid he better knows than you do what that cost is likely to be.'

'Does he think I cannot bear poverty?' exclaimed Isabel.

'He had not said so—' began Louis; 'but—'

'You both think me a poor, helpless creature,' said Isabel, her eyes kindling as they had done in the midst of danger. 'I can do better than you think. I may be able myself to do something towards our maintenance.'

He could not help answering, in the tone that gave courtesy to almost any words, 'I am afraid it does not answer for the wife to be the bread-winner.'

'Then you doubt my writing being worth anything?' she asked, in a hurt tone of humility. 'Tell me candidly, for it would be the greatest kindness;' and her eye unconsciously sought the bag where lay Sir Hubert, whom all this time her imagination was exalting, as the hero who would free them from their distresses.

'Worth much pleasure to me, to the world at large,' said Louis; 'but—you told me to speak plainly—to your home, would *any* remuneration be worth your own personal care?'

Isabel coloured, but did not speak.

Louis ventured another sentence—'It is a delicate subject, but you must know better than I how far James would be likely to bear that another, even you, should work for his livelihood.'

When Isabel spoke again, it was to ask further particulars ; and when he had told all, she found solace in exclaiming at the folly and injustice of James's enemies, until the sense of fairness obliged him to say, 'I wish the right and the wrong ever were fairly divided in this world ; and yet perhaps it is best as it is : the grain of right on either side may save the sin from being a presumptuous one.'

'It would be hard to find the one grain of right on the part of the Ramsbotham cabal.'

'Perhaps you would not think so, if you were a boy's mother.'

'Oh !' cried Isabel, with tears in her eyes, 'if he thought he had been too hasty, he always made such reparation that only cowards could help being touched. I'm sure they deserved it, and much more.'

'No doubt,' said Louis ; 'but, alas ! if all had their deserts—'

'Then you really think he was too severe ?'

'I think his constitutional character was hardly fit for so trying a post, and that his family and school troubles reacted upon each other.'

'You mean Clara's conduct ; and dear grandmamma—oh ! if she could but have stayed with us ! If you could have seen how haggard and grieved he came home from Cheveleigh ! I do not think he has been quite the same ever since.'

'And No. 5 has never been the same,' said Louis.

'Tell me,' said Isabel, suddenly, 'are we very poor indeed ?'

'I fear so, Isabel. Till James can find some employment, I fear there is a stern struggle with poverty before you.'

'Does that mean living as the Faithfulls do ?'

'Yes, I think your means will be nearly the same as theirs.'

'Fitzjocelyn,' said Isabel, after a long pause, 'I see what you have been implying all this time, and I have been feeling it too. I have been absorbed in my own pursuits, and not paid attention enough to details of management, and so I have helped to fret and vex my husband. You all think my habits an additional evil in this trial.'

'James has never said a word of the kind,' cried Louis.

'I know he has not ; but I ought to have opened my eyes to it long ago, and I thank you for helping me. There—will you take that manuscript, and keep it out of my way ? It has been a great tempter to me. It is finished now, and it might bring in something. But I can have only one thought now—how to make James happier and more at ease.'

'Then, Isabel, I don't think your misfortunes will be misfortunes.'

'To suffer for right principles should give strength for anything,' said Isabel. 'Think what many better women than I have had to endure, when they have had to be ashamed of their husband, not proud of him ! Now, I do hope and trust that God will help us, and carry us and the children through with it !'

Louis felt that in this frame she was truly fit to cheer and sustain James. How she might endure the actual struggle with penury, he dared not imagine ; at present he could only be carried along by her lofty composure.

James still lay on his tossed, uncomfortable bed in the evening twilight. The long, lonely hours, when he imagined Louis to have taken him at his word and gone home, had given him a miserable sense of desertion ; and as increasing sensations of illness took from him the hopes of moving on that day, he became distracted at the thought of the anxiety his silence would cause Isabel, and, after vainly attempting to write, had been lying with the door open, watching for some approaching step.

There was the familiar sound of a soft, gliding step on the stairs, then a pause, and the sweet soft voice, 'My poor James, how sadly uncomfortable you are !'

'My dear !' he cried, hastily raising himself, 'who has been frightening you ?'

'No one ; Fitzjocelyn was so kind as to come for me.'

'Ah ! I wished you to have been spared this unpleasant business.'

'Do you think I could bear to stay away ? Oh, James ! have I been too useless and helpless for you even to be glad to see me ?'

'It was for your own sake,' he murmured, pressing her hand. 'Has Fitzjocelyn told you ?'

'Yes,' said Isabel, looking up, as she sat beside him. 'Never mind, James. It is better to suffer wrong than to do it. I do not fear but that, if we strive to do our duty, God will help us, and make it turn out for the best for our children and ourselves.'

He grasped her hand in intense emotion.

'I know you are anxious about me,' added Isabel. 'My ways have been too self-indulgent for you to think I can bear hardness. I made too many professions at first ; I will make no more now, but only tell you that I trust to do my utmost, and not shrink from my duties. And now, not a word more about it till you are better.'

CHAPTER XXXVII

SWEET USES OF ADVERSITY

One furnace many times the good and bad will hold ;
Yet what consumes the chaff will only cleanse the gold.

R. C. TRENCH

DURING the succeeding days, James had little will or power to consider his affairs ; and Isabel, while attending on him, had time to think over her plans. Happily, they had not a debt. Mrs. Frost had so entirely impressed her grandson's mind with her own invariable rule of paying her way, that it had been one

of his grounds for pride that he had never owed anything to any man.

They were thus free to choose their own course, but Lord Ormersfield urged their remaining at Northwold for the present. He saw Mr. Calcott, who had been exceedingly concerned at the turn affairs had taken, and very far from wishing to depose James, though thinking that he needed an exhortation to take heed to his ways. It had been an improper reprimand, improperly received; but the Earl and the squire agreed that nothing but morbid fancy could conjure up disgrace, such as need prevent James Frost from remaining in his own house until he could obtain employment, provided he and his wife had the resolution to contract their style of living under the eye of their neighbours.

This gave neither of them a moment's uneasiness. It was not the direction of their pride; and even before James's aching head was troubled with deliberation, Isabel had discussed her plan with the Miss Faithfulls. She would imagine herself in a colony, and be troubled with no more scruples about the conventional tasks of a lady than if she were in the back-woods. They would shut up some of the rooms, take one servant-of-all-work, and Isabel would be nursery-maid herself. 'We may do quite as well as the carpenter's wife,' she said; 'she has more children and less income, and yet always seems to me the richest person whom I know.'

James groaned, and turned his face away. He could not forbid it, for even Isabel's exertion must be permitted rather than the dishonour of living beyond their means; and he consoled himself with thinking that when the deadening inertness of his illness should leave him, he should see some means of finding employment for himself, which would save her from toil and exertion; and, in the meantime, with all his keen self-reproach, it was a blessed thing to have been brought back to his enthusiastic admiration for her, all discontents and drawbacks utterly forgotten in her assiduous affection and gallant cheerfulness.

Lord Ormersfield had readily acceded to his son's wish to bring the party to spend Christmas at Ormersfield, as soon as James could be moved. During their visit the changes were to be made, and before setting out Isabel had to speak to the servants. Charlotte's alacrity and usefulness had made her doubly esteemed during her master's illness; and when he heard how she was to be disposed of, he seemed much vexed. He said that she was a legacy from his grandmother, and too innocent and pretty to be cast about among strange servants in all the places where the Conways visited; and that he would not have consented to the transfer, but that, under their present circumstances, it was impossible to keep her. If any evil came to her, it would be another miserable effect of his own temper.

Isabel thought he exaggerated the dangers, and she spoke brightly to Charlotte about fixing the day of her going to

Estminster, so as to be put into the ways of the place before her predecessor departed. The tears at once came into Charlotte's eyes, and she answered, 'If you please, ma'am, I should be very sorry to leave, unless I did not give satisfaction.'

'That is far from being the reason, Charlotte; but we cannot keep so good a servant—Mr. Frost has given up—'

'I have been put out of the school,' said James, from his sofa, in his stern sense of truth. 'We must live on as little as possible, and therefore must part with you, Charlotte, though from no fault of yours. You must look on us as your friends, and in any difficulty apply to us; for, as Mrs. Frost says, we look on you as a charge from my grandmother.'

Charlotte escaped to hide her tears; and when, a few minutes after, the Ormersfield carriage arrived, and nurses and babies were packed in, and her master walked feebly and languidly down-stairs, and her mistress turned round to say, kindly, 'You will let me know, Charlotte?' she just articulated, 'Thank you, ma'am, I will write.'

Mr. Frost's words had not been news to Charlotte. His affairs had been already pretty well understood and discussed; and the hard, rude, grasping comments of the vulgar cook—nay, even of the genteel nurse—had been so many wounds to the little maiden, bred up by Jane in the simplicity of feudal reverence and affection for all that bore the name of Frost Dynevor.

Her mistress left to the tender mercies of some servant such as these, some one who might only care for her own ease and profit, and not once think of who and what she had been! The little children knocked about by some careless girl! Never, never! All the doubts and scruples about putting her own weak head and vain heart in the way of being made faithless to Tom revived, reinforced by her strong and generous affection. A romantic purpose suddenly occurred to her, flushing her cheek and brightening her eye. In that one impulse, scrubbing, washing dishes, short lilac sleeves were either forgotten, or acquired a positive glory; and while the cook was issuing her invitations for a jollification and gossip at the expense of Mr. and Mrs. Frost, Charlotte sat in her attic, amid Jane's verbenas, which she had cherished there ever since their expulsion from the kitchen, and wrote and cried, and left off, to read over, and feel satisfied at, the felicity of her phrases, and the sentiment of her project.

'DEAR AND HONOURED MADAM,—Pardon the liberty I am taking but I am sure that you and my reverend and redoubted master would not willingly have inflicted so much pain as yesterday on a poor young female which was brought up from an orphan child by my dear late lamented mistress and owes everything to her and would never realize the touching lines of the sublime poet

Deserted in his utmost need
By those his former bounty fed.

As to higher wages and a situation offering superior advantages such as might prove attractive to other minds it has none to me. My turn is for fidelity in obscurity and dear and honoured lady I am a poor unprotected girl which has read in many volumes of the dangers of going forth into the snares of a wealthy and powerful family and begs you not to deprive her of the shelter of the peaceful roof which has been her haven and has been the seen of the joys and sorrows of her career. Dear lady pardon the liberty that I have taken but it would brake my heart to leave you and master and the dear children espeshilly in the present winter of adversity which I have hands to help in to the best of my poor abilities. Dear and honoured lady I have often been idle but I will be so no more I love the dear little ladies with all my heart and I can cook and act in any capacity and wages is no object I will not take none nor beer neither—and the parlour tea-leaves will be sufficient. Dear and honoured master and mistress forgive the liberty a poor girl has taken and lend a favourable ear to my request for if you persist in parting with me I know I shall not survive it.

‘Your humble and faithful Servant,
‘CHARLOTTE ARNOLD.’

Isabel received this letter while she was at breakfast with Lord Ormersfield and Louis, and it was, of course, impossible to keep it to herself. ‘Talking of no wages!’ said the Earl. ‘Send her off at once.’

‘You will despise me,’ said Isabel, with tears in her eyes; ‘but there is something very touching in it, in spite of the affectation. I believe she really means it.’

‘Affectation is only matter of taste,’ said Louis. ‘Half the simplicity of our day is only fashion; and Charlotte’s letter, with a few stops, and signed Chloe, would have figured handsomely in Mrs. Radcliffe’s time.’

‘It does not depend on me,’ said Isabel; ‘James could not bear her going before, and I am sure he will not now.’

‘I think he ought not,’ said Louis. ‘Poor girl! I do believe the snares of wealthy families and fidelity in obscurity, really mean with her the pomps and vanities *versus* duty and affection.’

‘I am sure I would not drive her back to them,’ said Isabel; ‘but I am only afraid the work will be too much for her strength.’

‘The willing heart goes all the way,’ said Louis; ‘and maybe it will be more wholesome than London, and sitting up.’

Isabel coloured and sighed; but added, that it would be infinite relief on the children’s account to keep some one so gentle-handed, and so entirely to be trusted.

James’s decision was immediate. He called the letter a farrago, but his laugh was mixed with tears at the faithful affection it displayed. ‘It was mere folly,’ he said, ‘to think of keeping her without wages; but, if she would accept such as could be

afforded after taking a rough village girl for her food to do the hard work, the experiment should be made, in the hope that the present straits would only endure for a short time.'

This little event seemed to have done him much good, and put him more at peace with the world. He was grateful for Lord Ormersfield's kindness and forbearance, and the enforced rest from work was refreshing him; while Isabel had never been so cheerful and lively in her life as now, when braced manfully for her work, full of energy, and feeling that she must show herself happy and courageous to support his depressed spirits. She was making a beginning—she was practising herself in her nursery duties, and, to her surprise, finding them quite charming; and little Kitty so delighted with all she did for her, that all the hitherto unsounded depths of the motherly heart were stirred up, and she could not think why she had never found out her true happiness. She looked so bright and so beautiful, that even Lord Ormersfield remarked it, pitying her for trials which he thought she little realized; but Louis augured better, believing that it was not ignorance but resolution which gave animation and brilliancy to her dark eye, and cheerfulness to her smile.

Fitzjocelyn took her to Dynevor Terrace in the afternoon to settle the matter with Charlotte; and, on the way, he took the opportunity of telling her that he had been reading Sir Hubert, and admired him very much, discussing him and Adeline with the same vivid interest as her own sisters showed in them as persons, not mere personages. Isabel said they already seemed to her to belong to a world much farther back than the last fortnight.

'There is some puzzle in the middle,' said Louis. 'I can't make out the hero whose addresses were so inconvenient to Adeline, and who ran away from the pirates. He began as a crabbed old troubadour, who made bad verses; and then he went on as a fantastic young Viscount, skipping and talking nonsense.'

'Oh!' cried Isabel, much discomposed. 'Did I leave that piece there? I took it to Estminster by mistake, and they told me of it. I should have taken it out.'

'That would have been a pity,' said Louis, 'for the Viscount is a much more living man than the old troubadour. When he had so many plans of poems for the golden violet that he made none at all, I was quite taken with him. I began to think I was going to have a lesson.'

Isabel blushed and tried to laugh, but it was so unsuccessful that Louis exclaimed in high glee—'There! I do believe I was the fantastic Viscount! Oh! Isabel, it was too bad! I can fairly acquit myself of skipping ever since I had the honour of your acquaintance.'

'Or of running away from the pirates,' said Isabel. 'No, it was a great deal too bad, and very wrong indeed. It was when you did not run away that I was so much ashamed, that I

thought I had torn out every atom. I never told any one—not even Virginia!’

Louis had a very hearty laugh, and, when Isabel saw him so excessively amused, she ventured to laugh too at her ancient prejudice, and the strange chance which had made the fantastic Viscount, Sir Roland’s critic.

‘You must restore him,’ said Louis, returning to business. ‘That old troubadour is the one inconsistency in the story, evidently not fitting into the original plot. I shall be delighted to sit for the portrait.’

‘I don’t think you could now,’ said Isabel. ‘I think the motley must have been in the spectacles with which I looked at you.’

‘Ah! it is a true poem,’ said Louis; ‘it must have been a great relief to your feelings! Shall I give it back to you?’

‘Oh! I can’t touch it now!’ cried Isabel. ‘You may give it to me; and if ever I have time to think again of it, I may touch it up, but certainly not now.’

‘And when you do, pray don’t omit the Viscount. I can’t lose my chance of going down to posterity.’

He went his way, while Isabel repaired to the Terrace, and found Charlotte awaiting her answer in much trepidation.

The low wages, instead of none at all, were a great disappointment, doing away with all the honour and sentiment, and merely degrading her in the eyes of her companions; but her attachment conquered this objection, and face to face with her mistress, the affectation departed, and left remaining such honest and sincere faithfulness and affection, that Isabel felt as if a valuable and noble-hearted friend had suddenly been made known to her. It was a silly little fanciful heart, but it was sound to the core; and when Isabel said, ‘There will be very hard work, Charlotte, but we will try to do our best for Mr. Frost and the children, and we will help each other,’ Charlotte felt as if no task could be too hard if it were to be met with such a look and smile.

‘Is it settled?’ asked Lord Fitzjocelyn, as Charlotte opened the door for him.

‘Oh, yes, thank you, my lord—’

‘But, Charlotte, one thing is decided. Mrs. Frost can afford no more *eau-de-Cologne*. The first hysterics, and you go!’

He passed up-stairs, and found Isabel beginning to dismantle the drawing-room—‘Which you arranged for us!’ she said.

A long, deep sigh was the answer, and Louis mused for some moments ere he said—‘It is hard work to say good-bye to trifles with which departed happiness seems connected.’

‘Oh, no!’ cried Isabel, eagerly. ‘With such a home, the happiness cannot be departed.’

‘No, not with such a home!’ said Louis, with a melancholy smile; ‘but I was selfish enough to be thinking who hung that picture—’

‘I don’t think you were the selfish person,’ said Isabel.

'Patience and work !' said Louis, rousing himself. 'Some sort of good time *must* come,'—and he quickly put his hand to assist in putting the Dresden shepherd and shepherdess into retirement, observing that they seemed the genii of the place, and he set his mind on their restoration.

'I do not think,' said Isabel, as she afterwards narrated this scene to her husband, 'that I ever realized his being so much attached to Mary Ponsonby ; I thought it was a convenient suitable thing in which he followed his father's wishes ; and I imagined he had quite recovered it.'

'He did not look interesting enough ? Yes ! he was slow in knowing his own mind ; but his heart once given there is no recalling it, whatever his father may wish.'

'Or my mother,' said Isabel, smiling.

'Ah ! I have never asked you what your party say of him in the London world.'

'They say he quite provokes them by being such a diligent member ; and that people debate as to whether he will distinguish himself. Some say he does not care enough ; and others, that he has too many crotchets.'

'Just so ! Public men are not made of that soft, scrupulous stuff, which only hardens and toughens when principle is clear before him. Well, as to society—'

'Virginia says he is hardly ever to be had ; he is either at the House, or he has something to do for his father ; he slips out of parties, and they never catch him unless they are in great want of a gentleman to take them somewhere, and then no one is so useful. Mamma has been setting innumerable little traps for him, but he marches straight through them all, and only a little tone of irony betrays that he sees through them. Every one likes him, and the only complaint is, that he is so seldom to be seen, keeping almost entirely to his father's set, always with his father—'

'Ay ! I can bear to watch his submission better than formerly. His attentions are in such perfect good taste that they are quite beautiful ; and his lordship has quite ceased snubbing, and begins to have a glimmering that when Louis says something never dreamt of in his philosophy, the defect may be in his understanding, and not in Fitzjocelyn's.'

'I could excuse him for not always understanding Fitzjocelyn ! But there never were two kinder people in the world ; and I could not have imagined that I should ever like Lord Ormersfield half so much.'

'He is improved. Louis's exclusive devotion has not been lost on him. Holdsworth has been sitting with me, and talking of the great change in the parish. He told me that at his first arrival here, seven years ago, when he was very young, he found himself quite disheartened and disgusted by the respectability of the place. Every one was cold, distant, correct, and self-esteeming ; so perfectly contented with themselves and the

routine, that he felt all his ardour thrown away, and it seemed to him that he was pastor to a steam-engine—a mere item in the proprieties of Ormersfield. He was almost ready to exchange, out of weariness and impatience, when Fitzjocelyn came home, and awoke fresh life and interest by his absurdities, his wonderful philanthropies, and extraordinary schemes. His sympathy and earnestness were the first refreshment and encouragement; and Holdsworth declares that no one can guess the benefit that he was to him even when he was most ridiculous. Since that, he says, the change has been striking, though so gradual. Louis has all the same freshness and energy, but without the fluctuation and impetuosity. And his example of humility and sincerity has worked, not only in reclaiming the wild outlying people, but even awakening the comfortable dependents from their self-satisfaction. Even Frampton is far from the impenetrable person he used to be.

‘And I suppose they have done infinite good to the wild Marksedge people?’

‘Some are better, some are worse. I believe that people always are worse when they reject good. I am glad to find, too, that the improvements answer in a pecuniary point of view. His lordship is amazed at his son’s sagacity, and they have never been so much at ease in money matters.’

‘Indeed! Well, I must own that I have always been struck with the very small scale on which things are done here. Just the mere margin of what is required by their station, barely an indulgence!’

‘I fancy you must look into subscriptions for Fitzjocelyn’s means,’ said James; ‘and for the rest, they have no heart for new furniture till he marries.’

‘Well! I wonder if Mary is worth so much heart! It might be the best thing for him if she would find some worthy merchant. He is very young still, and looks younger. I should like him to begin the world again.’

‘Ha! Isabel, you want to cook up a romance of your own for him.’

James was recovering cheerfulness. He thought he was bracing himself to bear bravely with an unmerited wrong. The injustice of his sentence hid from him the degree of justice; and with regard to his own temper, he knew better what he restrained than what he expressed, and habitually gave himself credit for what he did not say or do. There was much that was really good in his present spirit, and it was on the way to be better; but his was not the character to be materially altered by the first brunt of a sudden shock. It was a step that he had brought himself to forgive the trustees. He did not yet see that he had any need to be forgiven.

At the end of three weeks James and Isabel returned to their home, and to their new way of life; and Fitzjocelyn had only time to see that they were beginning their struggle with good

courage, before the meeting of Parliament summoned him to London.

Isabel fully justified Miss Faithfull's prediction. She was too truly high-minded to think any task beneath her ; and with her heart in, not out of her immediate work, she could not fail to be a happier woman. Success gave as much pleasure in a household duty as in an accomplishment—nay far more when it was a victory over herself, and an increase to the comfort of her husband. Her strength was much tried, and the children often fatigued and harassed her ; but there was unspeakable compensation in their fondness and dependence on her, and even in the actual services themselves. The only wonder began to be how she could have ever trusted them in any hands but her own. Her husband's affection and consideration were sources of joy ever renewed ; and though natural irritability and pressing anxieties might now and then betray him into a hasty word, his penitence so far surpassed the momentary pain it might have cost her, that she was obliged to do her utmost to comfort him. She sometimes found herself awkward or ignorant, and sometimes flagged from over-exertion ; yet throughout, James's approval, and her own sense that she was striving to do her best, kept her mind at rest. Above all, the secret of her happiness was, that the shock of adversity had awakened her from her previous deadness and sluggishness of soul, and made her alive to a feeling of trust and support, a frame of mind ever repenting, ever striving onwards. Thus she went bravely through the very class of trials that she would once have thought merely lowering, inglorious, and devoid of poetry. What would have been in itself sordid, gained a sweetness from the light of love and duty, and never in all her dreamy ease had she been as cheerful and light-hearted as in the midst of hardship and rigid economy. Her equable temper and calm composure came to her aid ; and where a more nervous and excitable woman would have preyed upon herself, and sunk under imaginary troubles, she was always ready to soothe and sustain the anxious and sensitive nature of her husband. After all, hers was the lightest share of the trial. To her, the call was to act, and to undergo misfortunes occasioned by no fault of hers ; to him, the call was the one most galling to an active and eager man—namely, to endure, and worse, to *see* endured, the penalty of his own errors. In vain did he seek for employment. A curacy, without a fair emolument, would have been greater poverty than their present condition, as long as the house was unlet ; and though he answered advertisements and made applications, the only eligible situations failed ; and he knew, among so many candidates, the last to be chosen would be a person of violent temper, unable to bear rebuke. Disappointment came upon disappointment, and the literary work with which, through Louis's exertions, he had been supplied, was not likely to bring in any speedy return.

All that he could do was to take more than his part in domestic trifles, such as most men would have scorned, and to relieve his wife as far as possible of the children, often at the cost of his writing. He bore the brunt of many a trial of which she was scarcely aware—slights from the harsh vulgar, and compassion from the kind vulgar; and the proud self-assertion was gone which had hardened him to all such stings. To his lot fell the misery of weighing and balancing what comforts could best be cut off without positive injury to his wife and little ones. To consider whether an empty house should be repaired for a doubtful tenant, to make the venture, and have it rejected, was a severe vexation, when the expense trenched on absolute necessities; and hardly less trying was it to be forced to accept the rent of the House Beautiful, knowing how ill it could be spared; and yet, that without it he must lapse into the hopeless abyss of debt. Moreover, there was

The terrible heart thrill
To have no power of giving

to some of the poor who had learnt to look to the Terrace in his grandmother's time; and meals were curtailed, that those in greater need might not be left quite unaided.

Nor was this the only cause for which James underwent actual stern privation. The reign of bad cookery was over. Charlotte, if unmethodical, was delicately neat; and though she kept them waiting for their dinner, always served it up with the precision of past prosperity. Cheap cookery and cottage economy were the study, and the results were pronounced admirable; but the master was the dispenser; and when a modicum of meat was to make nourishing a mountain of rice, or an ocean of broth, it would occur to him, as he helped Isabel, that the *pièce de résistance* would hardly hold out for the kitchen devourers. He would take the recipe at its word, and dine on the surrounding structure; and in spite of the cottage economy, he was nearly as hungry after dinner as before it, and people began to say that he had never recovered his looks since his illness. These daily petty acts of self-denial and self-restraint had begun to tame his spirit and open his eyes in a manner that neither precept nor example had yet effected.

Charlotte had imbibed to the full the spirit of patient exertion which pervaded the house. Mrs. Martha had told her she was a foolish girl, and would be tired of the place in a fortnight; but when she did not see her tired, she would often rush in after her two mistresses were shut up for the evening, scold Charlotte for her want of method, and finish all that was left undone, while Charlotte went up to the nursery to release her mistress. As to novels and sentiment, they had gone after Sir Hubert; and though Charlotte was what Martha expressively called 'fairly run off her feet,' she had never looked better nor happier. Her mistress treated her like a friend; she doted on the children,

and the cook was out of the kitchen ; Delaford was off her mind, and neither stairs nor even knife-cleaning could hurt her feelings. To be sure, her subordinate, a raw girl from Marksedge, devoured all that was set before her, and what was not eatable she broke ; but as she had been sent from home with no injunctions but to 'look sharp and get stout,' so she was only fulfilling her vocation ; and on some question of beer, her mother came and raved at Charlotte, and would have raved at Mrs. Frost, if her dignified presence had not overawed her. So she only took the girl away in offence, and Charlotte was much happier with an occasional charwoman to share her labours.

There was much happiness in No. 5, notwithstanding that the spring and summer of 1851 were very hard times ; and perhaps felt the more, because the sunny presence of Louis Fitzjocelyn did not shine there as usual.

He was detained in London all the Easter recess by his father's illness. Lord Ormersfield was bound hand and foot by a severe attack of rheumatism, caught almost immediately after his going to London. It seemed to have taken a strong hold of his constitution, and lingered on for weeks, so that he could barely move from his arm-chair by the fire, and began to give himself up as henceforth to be a crippled old man—a view out of which Louis and Sir Miles Oakstead tried by turns to laugh him ; indeed, Sir Miles accused him of wanting to continue his monopoly of his son—and of that doubly-devoted attention by which Louis enlivened his convalescence.

Society had very little chance with Fitzjocelyn now, unless he was fairly hunted out by the Earl, who was always haunted by ungrounded alarms for his health and spirits, and never allowed him to fail in the morning rides, which were in fact his great refreshment, as much from the quiet and the change of scene, as from the mere air and exercise.

'Father,' said he, coming in one day a little after Easter, 'you are a very wise man !'

'Eh !' said the Earl, looking up in wonder and expectation excited by this prelude, hoping for the fulfilment of some political prediction.

'He is a wise man,' proceeded Louis, 'who does not put faith in treasures, especially butlers ; also, who does not bring a school-boy to London with nothing to do !'

'What now ?' said the Earl. 'Is young Conway in a scrape ?'

'I am,' said Fitzjocelyn ; 'I have made a discovery, and I don't exactly see what to do with it. You see I have been taking the boy out riding with me, as the only thing I could well do for him these holidays. You must know he is very good and patronizing ; I believe he thinks he could put me up to a few things in time. Well, to-day, as we passed a questionable-looking individual, Walter bowed, as if highly elated by the honour of his acquaintance, and explained to me that he was the celebrated—I forget who, but that's owing to my defective education.

The fact is, that this Delaford, to whom my aunt implicitly trusts, has been introducing this unlucky boy to a practical course of *Bell's Life*—things that I went through Eton, and never even heard of.' And he detailed some of them.

'No more than she might have expected,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'And what is to be done?'

'I should say, never interfere between people and their servants, still less between them and their sons. You will do no good.'

'I cannot see this go on!' cried Louis. 'The boy told me all, by way of showing me his superiority. I believe he wants to introduce me to some of his distinguished friends. They flatter him, and make him a great man; and as to any scruples about his mother, Delaford has disposed of her objections as delicate weaknesses. When I began to look grave, the poor boy set it down to my neglected training, always spending my holidays in the country, and not knowing what fast men are up to.'

'And so he goes to destruction—just the sort of boy that does,' said the Earl, with due acquiescence in the course of the world.

'He need not,' exclaimed Louis. 'He is a nice boy, a very nice boy, if only he cared for his mother, or knew right from wrong.'

Lord Ormersfield smiled at these slight exceptions.

'He is heartily fond of Isabel,' said Louis. 'If I thought Jem could do any good, I would send for him; but he has made my aunt so much afraid of unworldliness just now, that I only wonder she lets Miss King stay on.'

'You had better leave it alone,' said the Earl, 'unless you can do anything with the boy. I am glad that I am not his guardian!'

'I wish I was,' sighed Louis.

'I suppose you will grow older some day,' said Lord Ormersfield. 'However, I see you will not be contented without going your own way to work.'

When the Earl saw his son the next day, Louis looked radiant at having taken one step. He had seen his aunt, and she had endured the revelation with more equanimity than he could have supposed possible. 'It was a house where they took things easily,' as he said; a house where nothing was more feared than a scene; and Lady Conway had thanked her nephew greatly for his communication; promised what he did not ask, that he should not be betrayed to Walter; assured him that the butler should be dismissed, without giving any reason, before the summer holidays; and for the few remaining days before Walter returned to Eton, she thought she might reckon on her dear Fitzjocelyn for keeping his eye upon him: no doubt all would be right when Delaford was once gone.

It was the old want of a high standard—the love of ease rather than the love of right. The Earl laughed at her short-sighted

policy, and resented her saddling Louis with the care of her son ; while Louis philosophized upon good-nature, and its use and abuse.

Whether Mr. Delaford learnt that Sir Walter had betrayed him to Lord Fitzjocelyn, or whether he took alarm from the young gentleman being kept under surveillance, he scented danger ; and took the initiative, by announcing to my lady that he intended to retire from his situation into private life at the month's end.

Lady Conway rejoiced in being spared the fabrication by which she had intended to dismiss her paragon without hurting his feelings, thanked Fitzjocelyn more than ever, and was sure that dear Walter would do very well.

But no sooner had Delaford departed than a series of discoveries began to be made. Lady Conway's bills reached back to dates far beyond those of the cheques which she had put into Delaford's hands to pay them ; and a tissue of peculation began to reveal itself, so alarming and bewildering to her, that she implored her nephew to investigate it for her.

Louis, rather against the will of his father, who was jealous of any additional tasks thrown on him, entered into the matter with the head of an accountant, and the zeal of a pursuer of justice ; and stirred up a frightful mass of petty and unblushing fraud, long practised as a mere matter of course upon the mistress, who had set the example of easy-going, insincere self-seeking. It involved the whole household so completely, that there was no alternative but a clearance of every servant, whether innocent or guilty, and a fresh beginning. Indeed, so great had been the debts which had accumulated, that there was no doubt that the treacherous butler must have been gambling to a great extent with his mistress's money ; and the loss was so heavy that Lady Conway found she should be obliged to retrench, 'just when she should have been so glad to have helped poor Isabel !' She must even give up a season in London, but dear Virginia was far too good and sensible to repine.

Lord Ormersfield, who had become much interested in the investigation, and assisted much by his advice, wanted her to go to Thornton Conway ; and Louis urged the step warmly as the best hope for Walter. But she could not live there, she said, without far too heavy an expenditure ; and she would make visits for the present, and find some cheap place abroad, where the girls could have masters.

And so her establishment was broken up, and Louis wrote warm congratulations to James that poor little Charlotte had not been tempted into the robber's den. Isabel could not help reading the whole history to Charlotte, who turned white at the notion of such wickedness, and could hardly utter a word ; though afterwards, as she sat rocking little Mercy to sleep, she bestowed a great deal of good advice on her, 'never to mind what nobody said to her, above all, when they talked

like a book, for there were a great many snakes and vipers in the grass, and 'twas best to know good friends when one had them.' And coupled with her moralizing, there was no small degree of humble thankfulness for the impulse that had directed her away from the evil. How could she ever have met Tom again if she had shared in the stigma on the dishonest household? Simple-hearted loyalty had been a guard against more perils than she had even imagined!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION

This Valley is that from whence also the King will give to His their Vineyards; and they that go through it shall sing, as Christian did, for all he met with Apollyon.

Pilgrim's Progress

THE close of the session still found Lord Ormersfield so stiff, bent, and suffering, that Louis with some difficulty persuaded him into trying the experiment of foreign baths, and in a few weeks' time they were both established at the *Hôtel du Grand Monarque* at Aix-la-Chapelle.

The removing his son to a dull watering-place, when he had so many avocations at home, had been a great vexation to the Earl; but he was delighted at the versatile spirits which made a holiday and delight of the whole, and found an endless fund of interest and occupation even in his attendance on the wearisome routine of health-seeking. German books, natural history, the associations of the place, and the ever-fresh study of the inhabitants and the visitors, were food enough for his lively conversation; and the Earl, inspirited by improving health, thought he had never enjoyed his son so much.

They were already old inhabitants of their hotel, when one afternoon they were much amused by finding a consequential courier gesticulating vehemently to the whole establishment on the apartments he was to secure for a superb Milord Anglais, who seemed to require half the hotel. Their sitting-room, overlooking the court, was especially coveted; and the landlord even followed them up-stairs with many excuses to ask if they could exchange it for another for only two days. Lord Ormersfield's negative had all the exceeding politeness of offended dignity; and Louis was much amused at the surmises, with which he consoled himself, that this was nothing but some trumpery speculator, most likely a successful quack doctor—no one else went about in such a style.

In a grave, grand way, he was not a little curious, and took care to place himself where he could command a view of the court; while Louis, making no secret of his own amusement, worked up an excitement to entertain his father, and stood watching at the window.

'Crack! crack! there are the postilions's whips! Now for the *Grand Monarque* himself—thundering under the archway! Why, there are only two of them, after all!—a lady and a little yellow old man! Father, you are right after all—he is the very pattern of a successful quack! How tall the lady is! Halloo!' and he stood transfixed for a moment, then sprang to the door, replying to his father's astonished question—'Clara! Clara Dynevor!'

The party were in course of proceeding up the principal staircase—the tall figure of a young lady in mourning moving on with so stately, so quiet, and almost weary a manner, that Louis for a moment drew back, doubting whether the remarkable height had not deceived him. Her head was turned away, and she was following the host, scarcely exerting herself to gaze round, when she came close to the open door, where Louis moved slightly forwards. There was a little ecstatic shriek, and both her hands were clasped in his, while her face was glowing with animation and delight.

'I don't know how to believe it!' she said; 'can you be here?'

'We are curing my father. Had you not heard of his illness?'

'I hear nothing,' said Clara, sadly, as she held out her hand to Lord Ormersfield, who had also come to meet her; and her uncle, who followed close behind, was full of cordial rejoicings on the encounter.

There was Jane Becket also, whom Louis next intercepted on her way to the bedrooms, laden with bags, and smiling most joyously to see him. 'To be sure, my young lord! And your papa here too, my lord? Well! who'll be coming abroad next, I wonder?'

'I wonder at nothing since I have met you here, Jane.'

'And I am right glad of it, my lord. You'll cheer up poor Miss Clara a bit, I hope—for— Bless me! won't those Frenchmen never learn to carry that box right side up?'

And off rushed Jane to a never-ending war of many tongues in defence of Clara's finery; while Louis, following into the sitting-room, found Mr. Dynevor inviting his father to the private dinner which he had ordered for greater dignity.

The proposal was accepted for the sake of spending the evening together, but little was thus gained; for, excepting for that one little scream, Louis would hardly have felt himself in the company of his Giraffe. She had become a very fine-looking person, not quite handsome, but not many degrees from it, and set off by profuse hair, and every advantage of figure and dress; while her manner was self-possessed and formal, indifferent towards ordinary people, but warm and coaxing towards her uncle. Blunt—almost morose to others—he was fondling and affectionate towards her; continually looking at the others as if to claim admiration of her, appealing to her every moment, and even when talking himself, his keen eye still seeming to watch every word or gesture.

The talk was all Switzerland and Italy—routes and pictures, mountains and cathedrals—all by rote, and with no spirit nor heart in the discussion—not a single word coming near home, nothing to show that Dynevor Terrace had any existence. Louis bade Clara good night, mortified at the absence of all token of feeling for her brother, and more than half repenting his advice to remain with her uncle. How could the warm-hearted girl have become this cold, haughty being, speaking by mechanism? He scarcely felt inclined to see her again; but early the next morning, as he was at breakfast with his father, there was a knock at the door, and a voice said, 'May I come in?' and as Louis opened, there stood the true Clara, all blushes and abruptness. 'I beg your pardon if it is wrong,' she said, 'but I could not help it. I must hear of him—of James.'

Lord Ormersfield welcomed her in an almost fatherly manner, and made her sit down, telling her that she had come at a good moment, since Louis had just received a letter; but he feared that it was not a very good account of Isabel.

'Isabel! Is anything the matter?'

'You are behindhand. Had you not heard of the arrival of number four?'

'I never hear anything,' said Clara, her eyes overflowing.

'Ha! not since we last met?' asked the Earl.

'They wrote once or twice; but you know they thought me wrong, and it has all died away since I went abroad. The last letter I had was dated in November.'

'You know nothing since that time?'

'No; I often thought of writing to Miss Faithfull, but I could not bear to show how it was, since they would not answer me. So I made bold to come to you, for I cannot ask before my uncle. He is quite passionate at the very name.'

'He is kind to you?' asked Lord Ormersfield, hastily.

'Most kind, except for that, the only thing I care about. But you have a letter! Oh! I am famishing to hear of them!'

She did not even know of the loss of the school; and her distress was extreme as she heard of their straits. 'It must be killing Isabel,' she said; 'if I could but be at home to work for her!'

'Isabel has come out beyond all praise,' said Louis. 'I am afraid there is much for them to undergo; but I do believe they are much happier in the midst of it.'

'Everybody must be happy in Dynevor Terrace,' said Clara.

Louis shook his head and smiled, adding, 'But, Clara, I do believe, if it were to come over again, Jem would hardly act in the same way.'

'Do you think he has forgiven me?'

'Judge for yourself.'

Her hand trembling, she caught at the well-known handwriting that to her seemed as if it could hardly be the property

of any one else ; and it was well for her that Louis had partly prepared her for the tone of depression, and the heavy trials it revealed, when she had been figuring to herself the writer enjoying all the felicity from which she was banished.

'No. 5, Dynevor Terrace, Sept, 14th, 1851.

'DEAR FITZJOCELYN,—I ought to have written yesterday ; but I took the whole duty at Ormersfield on Sunday, and was too lazy the next day to do more than keep the children out of the way, and look after Isabel ; for, though I am told not to be uneasy, she does not regain strength as she has done before. Over-exertion, or bad nursing, one or both, tell upon her ; and I wish we may not have too dear a bargain in the nurse whom she chose for cheapness' sake. My lectures were to have paid the expenses, but the author's need is not always the first consideration ; the money will not be forthcoming till Christmas, and meantime we cannot launch out. However, Ormersfield partridges are excellent fare for Isabel, and I could return thanks for the abundant supply that would almost seem disproportionate ; but you can guess the value as substantial comforts. A box of uneatable grouse from Beauchastel, carriage twelve shillings, was a cruel subject of gratitude ; but those good people mean more kindly than I deserve ; and when Isabel is well again, we shall rub on. This little one promises more resemblance to her than the others. We propose to call her Frances, after my poor mother and sister. Do you remember the thrill of meeting their names in Cheveleigh church ? That memorial was well done of my uncle. If these children were to be left as we were, you would, I know, be their best friend ; but I have a certain desire to see your own assurance to that effect. Don't fancy this any foreboding, but four daughters bind a man to life, and I sometimes feel as if I hardly deserved to see good days. If I am spared to bring up these children, I hope to make them understand the difference between independence and pride.

'I have been looking back on my life ; I have had plenty of time during these months of inaction, which I begin to see were fit discipline. Till Holdsworth left his parish under my charge the other day for six weeks, I have exercised no office of my ministry, as you know that Mr. Purvis's tone with me cut me off from anything that could seem like meddling with him. I never felt more grateful to any man than I did when Holdsworth made the proposal. It was as if my penance were accepted for the spirit against which you too justly warned me before my Ordination. Sunday was something between a very sorrowful and a very happy day.

'I did not see the whole truth at first. I was only aware of my unhappy temper, which had provoked the immediate punishment ; but the effort (generally a failure) to prevent my irritability from adding to the distresses I had brought on my poor

wife, opened my eyes to much that I had never understood. Yet I had presumed to become an instructor—I deemed myself irreproachable!

‘I believe the origin of the whole was, that I never distinguished a fierce spirit of self-exaltation from my grandmother’s noble resolution to be independent. It was a demon which took the semblance of good, and left no room for demons of a baser sort. Even as a boy at the grammar-school, I kept out of evil from the pride of proving myself gentlemanly under any circumstances; the motive was not a bit better than that which made me bully you. I can never remember being without an angry and injured feeling that my uncle’s neglect left my grandmother burdened, and obliged me to receive an inferior education; and with this, a certain hope that he would never put himself in the right, nor lay me under obligations. You saw how this motive actuated me, when I never discerned it. I trust that I was not insincere, though presumptuous and self-deceiving I was to an extent which I can only remember with horror. If it approached to sacrilege, may the wilful blindness be forgiven! At least, I knew it not; and with all my heart I meant to fulfil the vows I had taken on me. Thus, when my uncle actually returned, there was a species of revengeful satisfaction in making my profession interfere with his views, when he had made it the only one eligible for me. How ill I behaved—how obstinately I set myself against all mediation—how I wrapped myself in self-approval—you know better than I do. My conceit, and absurdity, and thanklessness have risen up before me; and I remember offers that would have involved no sacrifice of my clerical obligations—offers that I would not even consider—classing them all as “mere truckling with my conscience.” What did I take for a conscience?

‘Ever since, things have gone from bad to worse, grieving my dear grandmother’s last year, and estranging me from my poor little sister because she would not follow my dictation. At last my sins brought down the penalty, and I would not grieve except for the innocent who suffer with me. Perhaps, but for them, I should never have felt it. Nor do I feel tempted to murmur; for there is a strange peace with us throughout, in spite of a sad heart and too many explosions of my miserable temper, and the sight of the hardships so bravely met by my dear wife. But for all this, I should never have known what she is! She whispered to me last evening, when she saw me looking tired and depressed, that she had no fears for the future, for this had been the happiest year of her life. Nothing can make her forget to soothe me!

‘I have written a long rigmarole all about myself; but an outpouring is sometimes a relief, and you have borne with me often enough to do so now. My poor Clara’s pardon, and some kind of clerical duty, are my chief wishes; but my failures in the early part of the year have taught me how unworthy I am

to stir a step in soliciting anything of the kind. Did I tell you how some ten of the boys continue to touch their hats to me? and Smith, the butcher's son, often comes to borrow a book, and consult me on some of the difficulties that his father throws in his way. He is a fine fellow, and at least I hope that my two years at the school did him no harm. I was much impressed with the orderliness at Ormersfield Sunday-school. I wish I could have got half as much religious knowledge into my poor boys. I walked through your turnips in the South field, and thought they wanted rain. Frampton tells me the Inglewood harvest is in very good condition; but I will see the bailiff, and give you more particulars, when I can be better spared from home for a few hours. Kitty's assistance in writing has discomposed these last few lines.

‘Yours ever,
‘J. R. F. D.’

Clara turned away and groaned aloud several times as she read; but all she said, as she gave it back to Louis, was, ‘What is to be done? You must talk to my uncle.’

‘Ah, Clara! young gentlemen of the nineteenth century make but a bad hand of the part of benevolent fairy.’

‘I don't think my speaking would be of any use,’ said Clara. ‘Oh, if this only would have been a boy!’

Lord Ormersfield undertook to sound Mr. Dynevor, and found an early opportunity of asking whether he had heard of poor James's misfortune. Yes, he had known it long ago. No wonder, with such a temper. Kept it from the child, though. Would not have her always hankering after them.

Was he aware of his great distress and difficulties?

Ha, ha! thought so! Fine lady wife! No end of children—served him right!—to bring down his pride.

Lord Ormersfield hazarded a hint that James had seen his errors, and the school was no longer in the way.

‘No, no!’ said Oliver. ‘Too late now. Drink as he has brewed. He should have thought twice before he broke my poor mother's heart with his cantankerous ways. Cheveleigh beneath him, forsooth! I'm not going to have it cut up for a lot of trumpery girls! I've settled the property and whatever other pickings there may be upon my little Clara—grateful, and worthy of it! Her husband shall take Dynevor name and arms—unless, to be sure, he had a title of his own. The girl was much admired at Rome last winter; had a fair offer or two, but not a word will she say to any of them. I can't tell what's in her head, not I!’

And he looked knowingly at Lord Ormersfield, and willingly extended his stay at Aix-la-Chapelle, letting Fitzjocelyn organize expeditions from thence to Liège and other places in the neighbourhood.

The two cousins were so glad to be together, and the Earl so

much pleased that Louis should have anything which gave him so much delight as this meeting with his old playfellow, that he did all in his power to facilitate and prolong their intercourse. He often sacrificed himself to Oliver's prosings on the Equatorial navigation, that the two young people might be at liberty ; and he invited Clara to their early breakfast and walk before her uncle wanted her in the morning. These were Clara's times of greatest happiness, except that it gave her a new and strange sensation to be talked to by his lordship like a grown-up—nay, a sensible woman. Once she said to herself, laughing, 'He really treats me almost as if I were poor Mary herself.' And then came another flash : 'Perhaps he would even like me on the same terms !' And then she laughed again, and shook her head : 'No, no, my lord, your son is much too good for that ! Uncle Oliver would not have looked so benignant at us when we were sitting in the gardens last night, if he had known that I was giving Louis all my Lima letters. I wish they were more worth having ! It was very stupid of me not to know Mary better, so that we write like two old almanacs. However, my letter from hence will be worth its journey to Peru.'

Clara's heart was several degrees lighter, both from the pleasure of the meeting and a suggestion of the Earl's, upon which she had at once acted, and which seemed, even as she laid pen to paper, to bring her somewhat nearer to her brother.

Her letter arrived at No. 5 on the next Monday morning at breakfast-time. It did not at first attract the attention of James. The Sunday exertions had again left a mental and physical lassitude, showing how much care and privation had told upon his strength ; and Isabel's still tardy convalescence weighed him down with anxiety for the future, and almost with despair, as he thought of the comforts for want of which she suffered, though so patiently and silently dispensing with them. To his further vexation, he had, on the previous Saturday, seen Charlotte receiving at the back-door an amount of meat beyond her orders ; and, having checked himself because too angry and too much grieved to speak at once, had reserved the reproof for the Monday, when Charlotte brought in her book of petty disbursements.

Failing to detect the obnoxious item, he said, 'Where's the account of the meat that came in on Saturday ?'

'There, sir !' said Charlotte, indicating the legitimate amount, but blushing violently.

'That was not all ?' he said, with a look of stern interrogation.

'Oh ! if you please, sir, that was nothing !'

'This will not do, Charlotte ! I can have nothing taken into my house without being paid for. I insist on knowing what you could mean ?'

'Oh, sir !' tearfully exclaimed the girl, 'it is paid for—I'll show you the account, if you will—with my own money. I'd not have had you hear of it for the world ; but I could not bear

that nurse's insinuations about her meat five times a day—she that never nursed nothing like a real lady before! But I meant no harm, sir; and I hope you'll excuse the liberty, for I did not mean to take none; and I'm sure I'm quite contented for my own part, nor never meant to complain.

'I know you did not, Charlotte! You are only too patient and kind—' But his voice broke down, and he was forced silently to sign to her to leave him.

'Can humiliation go farther!' he thought. 'My boasted independence ending in this poor, faithful servant being stung, by the sneers of this hired woman, into eking out her scanty meals with her own insufficient wages!'

Little Catharine, who had been gazing with dilated black eyes, came scrambling on his knee to caress him, perceiving that he was grieved.

'Ah! Kitty, Kitty!' he said, 'it is well that you are too young to feel these troubles!'

'Papa! letter!' cried Kitty, waving the unregarded letter in the triumph of discovery.

'The Reverend James Frost.' It was the writing formed by his own copies, which he could not see without a sharp pang of self-reproach for cruel injustice and unkindness.

Kitty slid down with the empty envelope to act reading to the twins, whom she caught by turns as they crawled away, and set up straight before her. Her operations and their remonstrances, though as loud as they were inarticulate, passed utterly unheard and unheeded by their father, as he read—

'Hôtel du Grand Monarque, Aix-la-Chapelle, Sept. 18th.

'MY DEAREST JAMES,—As a mere matter of honesty and justice, I may venture to write to you. You always accepted from dear grandmamma the income from the money in the Stocks. I did not know that half of it has since come to me, till Lord Ormersfield paid me this last year's dividend; and if you will not have his enclosed cheque for it, put it in the fire, for I will never have it in any form. It is not my uncle's, but my own; and if you would make me very happy, write to me here. You must not suppose that I am trying to buy a letter; but I look on this as yours, and I thought you had it till Lord Ormersfield told me about it. We met him and Louis quite unexpectedly—the best thing that has happened to me for years; though they told me much that grieves me exceedingly—but I cannot write about it till I know that I may. Tell me of dear Isabel and the babes. My heart yearns after them! it would leap up at the sight of a stone from the Terrace!

'Your ever affectionate

CLARA.'

His first impulse was, as though he feared to repent, to turn to his desk, the tears of feeling still in his eyes, and dash off these words:—

'Your bounty, my dearest sister, is scarcely less welcome than the forgiving spirit which prompted it. I will not conceal that I was sorely in need of means to supply Isabel with the comforts that she requires. That your affection can survive my treatment last year, makes me equally grateful to you and ashamed of what then took place.'

He scarcely dared to look upon those phrases. Great as were his needs, and kindly as the proffer was made, it was new and painful to him to lie under any such obligation, and he could hardly bend his spirit to know that never again should he be able to feel that he had never been beholden for money to a living creature. And while he felt it due to his sister to own the full extent of the benefit, he weighed his words as he wrote on, lest the simplest facts should look like a craving for further assistance.

Charlotte came up to remove the breakfast, and he looked up to give an order for some nourishing dainty for her mistress, adding, 'What did that mutton come to? No, I am not displeased with you, but Miss Clara has sent me some money.'

His assurance was needed, for Charlotte went down thinking she had never seen master look so stern. He had spoken from a sense that the truth was due to the generous girl; but each word had been intense pain. He wrote on, often interrupted by little riots among the children, and finally by a sharp contention, the twins having possessed themselves of a paper-knife, which Kitty, with precocious notions of discipline, considered as forbidden; and little Mercy was rapped over the fingers in the struggle. The roar brought down interference, and Kitty fell into disgrace; but when, after long persuasion, she was induced to yield the paper-cutter, kiss and make friends, Mercy, instead of embracing, locked her fingers into her dark curls, and tugged at them in a way so opposite to her name, that all Kitty's offence was forgotten in her merit for stopping her scream half-way at the sight of her father's uplifted finger, and his whisper of 'Poor mamma!'

That life of worry and baby squabbles, the reflection of his own faults, was hard to bear; and with a feeling of seeking a refuge, when the two little ones had fallen into their noonday sleep, and were left with their mother to the care of good Miss Mercy, he set out for some parish work at Ormersfield, still taking with him little Kitty, whose quicksilver nature would never relieve her elders by a siesta.

He was afraid to speak to Isabel until he should have composed himself; and, harassed and weary in spirits and in frame, he walked slowly, very sore at the domestic discovery, and scarcely feeling the diminution of the immediate pressure in the new sense of degradation. He could own that it was merited, and was arguing with himself that patience and gratitude were the needful proofs that the evil temper had been expelled. He called back his thankfulness for his wife's safety,

his children's health, the constancy of his kind friends, and the undeserved ardour of his young sister's affection, as well as poor little Charlotte's unselfishness. The hard exasperated feeling that had once envenomed every favour, and barbed every dart that wounded him, was gone; he could own the loving kindness bestowed on him, both from Heaven and by man, and began to find peace and repose in culling the low fragrant blossoms which cheered even the Valley of Humiliation.

He turned down the shady lane, overhung by the beech-trees of Mr. Calcott's park; and as he lifted Kitty in his arms to show her the robin-redbreast, he did not feel out of tune with the bird's sweet autumnal notes, nor with the child's merry little voice, but each refreshed his worn and contrite spirit.

The sound of hoofs approaching made him turn his head; and while Kitty announced 'horse!' and 'man!' he recognized Mr. Calcott, and felt abashed, and willing to find a retreat from the meeting; but there was no avoiding it, and he expected, as usual, to be passed with a bow; but the Squire slackened his pace as he overtook him, and called out, good-humouredly, 'Ha, Mr. Frost, good morning' (once it would have been *Jem*). 'I always know you by the little lady on your shoulder. I was intending to call on you this afternoon on a little business; but if you will step up to the house with me, I shall be much obliged.'

James's heart beat thick with undefined hope; but, after all, it might be only to witness some paper. After what had occurred, and Mrs. Calcott considering herself affronted by Isabel, bare civility was forgiveness; and he walked up the drive with the Squire, who had dismounted, and was inquiring with cordial kindness for Mrs. Frost, yet with a little awkwardness, as if uncertain on what terms they stood, more as if he himself were to blame than the young clergyman.

Arriving at the house, James answered for his little girl's absence of shyness, and she was turned over to the Miss Calcotts, while the Squire conducted him to the study, and began with hesitation and something of apology—'It had struck him—it was not worth much—he hardly liked to propose it, and yet till something better should turn up—anything was better than doing nothing.' To which poor James heartily agreed. The board of guardians, where Mr. Calcott presided, were about to elect a chaplain to the union workhouse; the salary would be only fifty pounds, but if Mr. Frost would be willing to offer himself, it would be a great blessing to the inmates, and there would be no opposition.

Mr. Calcott, making the proposal from sincere good-will, but with some dread how the Pendragon blood would receive it, was absolutely astounded by the effect.

Fifty pounds additional per annum was a boon only to be appreciated after such a pinching year as the past; the gratitude for the old Squire's kind pardon was so strong, and the blessing of re-admission to pastoral work touched him so deeply,

that, in his weakened and dejected state, he could not restrain his tears, nor for some moments utter a word. At last he said, 'Oh, Mr. Calcott, I have not deserved this at your hands.'

'There, there,' said the Squire, trying to laugh it off, though he too became husky, 'say no more about it. It is a poor thing, and can't be made better; but it will be a real kindness to us to look after the place.'

'Let me say thus much,' said James, 'for I cannot be at peace till I have done so—I am aware that I acted unjustifiably in that whole affair, both when elected and dismissed.'

'No, no, don't let's go over that again!' said Mr. Calcott, in dread of a scene. 'An over-ardent friend may be a misfortune, and you were very young. Not that I would have taken your resignation if it had been left to me, but the world has grown mighty tender. I dare say you never flogged a boy like what I underwent fifty years ago, and was the better for it;' and he launched into some frightful old-world stories of the like inflictions, hoping to lead away from personalities; but James was resolved to say what was on his mind. 'It was not severity,' he said, 'it was temper. I richly deserved some portion of the rebuke, and it would have been well for me if that same temper had allowed me to listen to you, sir, or to reason.'

'Well,' said Mr. Calcott, kindly, 'you think very rightly about the matter, and a man of six-and-twenty has time to be wiser, as I tell Mrs. Calcott, when Sydney treats us to some of his theories. And now you have said your say, you must let me say mine, and that is, that there are very few young couples—aye, or old ones—who would have had the sense to go on as you are doing, fighting it out in your own neighbourhood without nonsense or false shame. I honour you and Mrs. Frost for it, both of you!'

James coloured deeply. He could have found commendation an impertinence, but the old Squire was a sort of patriarch in the county, and appreciation of Isabel's conduct must give him pleasure. He stammered something about her having held up wonderfully, and the salary being an immense relief, and then took refuge in matter-of-fact inquiries on his intended functions.

This lasted till nearly half-past one, and Mr. Calcott insisted on his staying to luncheon. He found the ladies greatly amused with their little guest—a very small, but extremely forward and spirited child; not at all pretty, with her brown skin and womanly eyes, but looking most thoroughly a lady, even in her little brown-holland frock, and white sun-bonnet, her mamma's great achievement. Neither shy nor sociable, she had allowed no one to touch her, but had entrenched herself in a corner behind a chair, through the back of which she answered all civilities, with more self-possession than distinctness, and convulsed the party with laughing, when they asked if she could play at bo-peep, by replying that 'the children did.' She sprang from her place of refuge to his knee as soon as he entered, and occupied that

post all luncheon time, comporting herself with great discretion. There was something touching in the sight of the tenderness of the young father, taking off her bonnet, and settling her straggling curls with no unaccustomed hands; and Mrs. Calcott's heart was moved, as she remarked his worn, almost hollow cheeks, his eyes still quick, but sunk and softened, his figure spare and thin, and even his dress not without signs of poverty; and she began making kind volunteers of calling on Mrs. Frost, nor were these received as once they would have been.

'He is the only young man,' said Mr. Calcott, standing before the fire, with his hands behind him, as soon as the guest had departed, 'except his cousin at Ormersfield, whom I ever knew to confess that he had been mistaken. That's the difference between them and the rest, not excepting your son Sydney, Mrs. Calcott.'

Mamma and sisters cried in chorus that Sydney had no occasion for such confessions.

The Squire gave his short, dry laugh, and repeated that 'Jem Frost and young Fitzjocelyn differed from other youths, not in being right but in being wrong.'

On which topic Mrs. Calcott enlarged, compassionating poor Mr. Frost with a double quantity of pity for his helpless beauty of a fine lady-wife; charitably owning, however, that she really seemed improved by her troubles. She should have thought better of her if she had not kept that smart housemaid, who looked so much above her station, and whom the housekeeper had met running about the lanes in the dark, the very night when Mr. Frost was so ill.

'Pshaw! my dear,' said her husband, 'cannot you let people be judges of their own affairs?'

It was what he had said on the like occasions for the last thirty years; but Mrs. Calcott was as wise as ever in other folks' matters.

The fine lady-wife had meanwhile been arranging a little surprise for her husband. She was too composed to harass herself at his not returning at midday; she knew him and Kitty to be quite capable of taking care of each other, and could imagine him detained by parish work, and disposing of the little maiden with Betty Gervas, or some other Ormersfield friend; but she had thought him looking fagged and worried; she feared his being as tired as he had been on the Sunday, and she could not bear that he should drink tea uncomfortably in the study, tormented by the children. So she had repaired to the parlour; and Miss Mercy, after many remonstrances, had settled her there; and when the good little lady had gone home to her sister's tea, Isabel lay on the sofa, wrapped in her large soft shawl, languidly attempting a little work, and feeling the room dreary, and herself very weak, and forlorn, and desponding, as she thought of James's haggard face, and the fresh anxieties that would be entailed on him if she should

become sickly and ailing. The tear gathered on her eyelash as she said to herself, 'I would not exert myself when I could ; perhaps now I shall not be able, when I would give worlds to lighten one of his cares !' And then she saw one little bit of furniture standing awry, in the manner that used so often to worry his fastidious eye ; and, in the spirit of doing anything to please him, she moved across the room to rectify it, and then sat down in the large easy-chair, wearied by the slight exertion, and becoming even more depressed and hopeless ; 'though,' as she told herself, 'all is sure to be ordered well. The past struggle has been good—the future will be good if we can but treat it rightly.'

Just as the last gleams were fading on the tops of the Ormersfield coppice, she heard the hall-door, and James's foot-step ; and it was more than the ordinary music of his 'coming up the stair ;' there was a spring and life in it that thrilled into her heart, and glanced in her eye, as she sat up in her chair, to welcome him with no forced smile.

And as he came in with a pleased exclamation, his voice had no longer the thin, worn sound, as if only resolute resignation prevented peevishness ; there was a cheerfulness and solidity in the tone, as he came fondly to her side, regretted having missed her first appearance, and feared she had been long alone.

'Oh, no ; but I was afraid you would be so tired ! Carrying Kitty all the way, too ! But you look so much brighter.'

'I am brighter,' said James. 'Two things have happened for which I ought to be very thankful. My dear, can you bear to be wife to the chaplain of the Union at fifty pounds a year ?'

'Oh ! have you something to do ?' cried Isabel ; 'I am so glad ! Now we shall be a little more off your mind. And you will do so much good ! I have heard Miss Mercy say how much she wished there were some one to put those poor people in the right way.'

'Yes ; I hope that concentrated earnestness of attention may do something to make up for my deficiency in almost every other qualification,' said James. 'At least, I feel some of the importance of the charge, and never was anything more welcome.'

'And how did it happen ?'

'People are more forgiving than I could have hoped. Mr. Calcott has offered me this, in the kindest way ; and as if that were not enough, see what poor little Clara says.'

'Poor little Clara !' said Isabel, reading the letter ; 'you don't mean to disappoint her ?'

'I should be a brute if I did. No ; I wrote to her this morning to thank her for her pardoning spirit.'

'You should have told me ; I should like to send her my love. I am glad she has not quite forgotten us, though she mistook the way to her own happiness.'

'Isabel ! unless I were to transport you to Cheveleigh a year ago, nothing would persuade you of my utter wrong-headedness.'

‘Nor that, perhaps,’ said Isabel, with a calm smile.

‘Not my having brought you to be grateful for the Union chaplaincy?’

‘Not if you had brought me to the Union literally,’ said Isabel, smiling. ‘Indeed, dear James, I think we have both been so much the better and happier for this last year, that I would not have been without it for any consideration; and if any mistakes on your part led to it, they were mistakes on the right side. Don’t shake your head, for you know they were what only a good man could have made.’

‘That may be all very well for a wife to believe!’ And the rest of the little dispute was concluded, as Charlotte came smiling up with the tea.

CHAPTER XXXIX

‘BIDE A WEE’

Come unto these yellow sands,
And then take hands!—*Tempest*

THE Ponsonby family were spending the hot season at Chorillos, the Peruvian watering-place, an irregular assembly of cane-built, mud-besmeared ranchos, close on the shore of the Pacific, with the mountains seeming to rise immediately in the rear.

They had gone for Mr. Ponsonby’s health, and Rosita’s amusement; and in the latter object they had completely succeeded. In her bathing-dress, full trousers, and a beautifully-embroidered blouse, belted at the waist, a broad-brimmed straw hat, and her raven hair braided in two long tresses, she wandered on the shore with many another fair Limenian, or entered the sea under the protection of a brown Indian; and, supported by *matés* or gourds, would float for hours together among her companions, splashing about, and playing all sorts of frolics, like so many mermaids.

In the evening she returned to more terrestrial joys, and arraying herself in some of her infinite varieties of ball-dresses, with flowers and jewels in her hair, a tiny Panama hat cocked jauntily on the top of her head, and a rich shawl with one end thrown over the shoulder, she would step daintily out in her black satin shoes, with old Xavier in attendance, or sometimes with Robson as her cavalier, to meet her friends on the beach, or make a call in the lamp-lit corridor of some other rancho. There were innumerable balls, dances, and picnics to the rich and fertile villages and haciendas around, and fêtes of every description almost every evening; visits to the tombs of the old Peruvians, whose graves were often rudely and lightly searched for the sake of their curious images and golden ornaments. The Señora declared it was the most lovely

summer she had ever spent, and that nothing should induce her to return to Lima while her friends remained there.

The other object, of re-invigorating Mr. Ponsonby, had not been attained. He had been ailing for some time past, and, instead of deriving benefit from the sea-breezes, only missed the comforts of home. He was so testy and exacting that Mary would have seldom liked to leave him to himself, even if she had been disposed to lead the life of a fish; and she was seldom away from him, unless Robson came down from Lima to transact business with him.

Mary dreaded these interviews, for her father always emerged from them doubly irritable and dispirited; and when Rosita claimed the Señor Robson as her knight for her evening promenade, and the father and daughter were left alone together, he would blame the one lady for going, the other for staying—then draw out his papers again, and attempt to go over them, with a head already aching and confused—he angry at Mary's entreaties that he would lay them aside, or allow her to help him—and presently be obliged with a sigh to desist, and lie back in his chair, while she fanned him, or cooled his forehead with iced water. Yet he was always eager and excited for Robson to come; and a delay of a day would put his temper in such a state that his wife kept out of his sight, leaving Mary to soothe him as she might.

'Mary,' said her father one evening, when she was standing at the window of the corridor, refreshing her eye with gazing at the glorious sunset in the midst of a pile of crimson and purple clouds, reflected in the ocean—'Mary, Ward is going to New York next week.'

'So soon?' said Mary.

'Aye, and he is coming here to-morrow to see you.'

Mary still looked out with a sort of interest to see a little gold flake change its form as it traversed a grand violet tower.

'I hope you will make him a more reasonable answer than you did last time,' said her father; 'it is too bad to keep the poor man dangling on at this rate! And such a man!'

'I am very sorry for it, but I cannot help it,' said Mary; 'no one can be kinder or more forbearing than he has been, but I wish he would look elsewhere.'

'So you have not got that nonsense out of your head!' exclaimed Mr. Ponsonby, with muttered words that Mary would not hear. 'All my fault for ever sending you among that crew! Coming between you and the best match in Lima—the best fellow in the world—strict enough to content Melicent or your mother either! What have you to say against him, Mary? I desire to know that.'

'Nothing, papa,' said Mary, 'except that I wish he could make a better choice.'

'I tell you, you and he were made for each other. It is the most provoking thing in the world that you will go on in this

obstinate way ! I can't even ask the man to do me a kindness, with having an eye to these abominable affairs, that are all going to the dogs. There's old Dynevor left his senses behind him when he went off to play the great man in England, writing every post for remittances, when he knows what an outlay we've been at for machinery ; and there's the Equatorial Company cutting its own throat at Guayaquil, and that young fellow up at the San Benito not half to be trusted—Robson can't make out his accounts ; and here am I such a wretch that I can hardly tell what two and two make ; and here's Ward, the very fellow to come in and set all straight in the nick of time ; and I can't ask him so much as to look at a paper for me, because I'm not to lay myself under an obligation.'

'But, papa, if our affairs are not prosperous, it would not be fair to connect Mr. Ward or any one with them.'

'Never you trouble yourself about that ! You'll come in for a pretty fortune of your own, whatever happens to that abominable cheat of a Company ; and that might be saved if only I was the man I was, or Dynevor was here. If Ward would give us a loan, and turn his mind to it, we should be on our legs in an instant. It is touch and go just now !—I declare, Mary,' he broke out again after an interval, 'I never saw anything so selfish as you are ! Linger and pine on about this foolish young man, who has never taken any notice of you since you have been out here, and whom you hear is in love with another woman—married to her very likely by this time—or, maybe, only wishing you were married and out of his way.'

'I do not believe so,' answered Mary, stoutly.

'What ! you did not see Oliver's letter from that German place ?'

'Yes, I did,' said Mary ; 'but I know his manner to Clara.'

'You do ? You take things coolly, upon my word !'

'No,' said Mary. 'I know they are like brother and sister, and Clara could never have written to me as she has done, had there been any such notion. But that is not the point, papa. What I know is, that while my feelings are what they are at present, it would not be right of me to accept any one ; and so I shall tell Mr. Ward, if he is still determined to see me. Pray forgive me, dear papa. I do admire and honour him very much, but I cannot do any more ; and I am sorry I have seemed pining or discontented, for I tried not to be so.'

A grim grunt was all the answer that Mr. Ponsonby vouchsafed. His conscience, though not his lips, acquitted poor Mary of discontent or pining, as indeed it was the uniform cheerfulness of her demeanour that had misled him into thinking the unfortunate affair forgotten.

He showed no symptoms of speaking again ; and Mary, leaning back in her chair, had leisure to recover herself after the many severe strokes that had been made at her. There was one which she had rebutted valiantly at the moment, but which

proved to have been a poisoned dart—that suggestion that it might be selfish in her not to set Louis even more free, by her own marriage!

She revolved the probabilities: Clara, formed, guided, supported by himself, the companion of his earlier youth, preferred to all others, and by this time, no doubt, developed into all that was admirable. What would be more probable than their mutual love? And when Mary went over all the circumstances of her own strange courtship, she could not but recur to her mother's original impression, that Louis had not known what he was doing. Those last weeks had made her feel rather than believe otherwise, but they were far in the distance now, and he had been so young! It was not unlikely that even yet, while believing himself faithful to her, his heart was in Clara's keeping, and that the news of her marriage would reveal to them both, in one rush of happiness, that they were destined for each other from the first.

Mary felt intense pain, and yet a strange thrill of joy, to think that Louis might at last be happy.

She drew Clara's last letter out of her basket, and re-read it, in hopes of some contradiction. Clara's letters had all hitherto been stiff. She had not been acknowledged to be in the secret of Mary's engagement while it subsisted, and this occasioned a delicacy in writing to her on any subject connected with it; and so the mention of the meeting at the 'Grand Monarque' came in tamely, and went off quickly into Lord Ormersfield's rheumatism and Charlemagne's tomb. But the remarkable thing in the letter was the unusual perfume of happiness that pervaded it; the conventional itinerary was abandoned, and there was a tendency to droll sayings—nay, some shafts from a quiver at which Mary could guess. She had set all down as the exhilaration of Louis's presence, but perhaps that exhilaration was to a degree in which she alone could sympathize.

Mary was no day-dreamer; and yet, ere Rosita's satin shoe was on the threshold, she had indulged in the melancholy fabric of a castle at Ormersfield, in which she had no share, except the consciousness that it had been her self-sacrifice that had given Louis at last the felicity for which he was so well fitted.

But at night, in her strange little room, lying in her hammock, and looking up through her one unglazed window, high up in the roof, to the stars that slowly travelled across the space, she came back to a more collected opinion. She had no right to sacrifice Mr. Ward as well as herself. Louis could not be more free than she had made him already; and it would be doing evil that good might come, to accept the addresses of one man while she could not detach her heart from another. 'Have I ever really tried yet?' she thought. 'Perhaps I am punishing him and poor Mr. Ward, because, as papa says, I have languished, and have never tried in earnest to wean my thoughts from him. He was the one precious memory, besides my dear mother, and she

never thought it would come to good. He will turn out to have been constant to Clara all the time, though he did not know it.'

Even if Mr. Ponsonby had been in full health, he would have had no inclination to spare Mary the conversation with Mr. Ward, who took his hot nine miles' ride from Lima in the early morning, before the shadow of the mountains had been drawn up from the arid barren slope leading to Chorillos.

He came in time for the late breakfast, when the table was loaded with various beautiful tropical fruits, tempting after his ride, and in his state of suspense. He talked of his journey, and of his intended absence, and his regret, in a manner half mechanical, half dreamy, which made Mary quite sorry for him; it was melancholy for a man of his age to have fixed so many fond hopes where disappointment was in store for him. She wished to deal as kindly with him as she could, and did not shrink away when her father left them, muttering something about a letter, and Rosita went to take her siesta.

With anxious diffidence he ventured to ask whether she remembered what had passed between them on the San Benito mountain.

'Yes, Mr. Ward; but I am afraid I do not think differently now, in spite of all your kindness.'

Poor Mr. Ward's countenance underwent a change, as if he had hoped more. 'Your father had given me reason to trust,' he said, 'that you had recovered your spirits; otherwise I should hardly have presumed to intrude on you. And yet, before so long an absence, you cannot wonder that I longed to hear something decisive.'

'Indeed I wished what I said before to be decisive. I am very sorry to give pain to one so much kinder than I deserve, and to whom I look up so much; but you see, Mr. Ward, I cannot say what is untrue.'

'Miss Ponsonby,' said Mr. Ward, 'I think you may be acting on a most noble but mistaken view. I can well believe that what you have once experienced you can never feel again. That would be more than I should dare to ask. My own feeling for you is such that I believe I should be able to rejoice in hearing of the fulfilment of your happiness, in your own way; but since there seems no such probability, cannot you grant me what you can still give, which would be enough to cause me the greatest joy to which I have ever aspired; and if my most devoted affection could be any sufficient return, you know that it is yours already.'

The grave earnestness with which he spoke went to Mary's heart, and the tears came into her eyes. She felt it almost wrong to withstand a man of so much weight and worth; but she spoke steadily—'This is very kind—very kind indeed; but I do not feel as if it would be right.'

'Will you not let me be the judge of what will satisfy me?'

'You cannot judge of my feelings, Mr. Ward. You must

believe me that, with all my esteem and gratitude, I do not yet feel as if I should be acting rightly by you or by any one else, under my present sentiments.'

'You do not yet feel?'

Mary felt that the word was a mistake. 'I do not think I ever shall,' she added.

'You will not call it persecution, if I answer that perhaps I may make the venture once more,' he said. 'I shall live on that word "yet" while I am at New York. I will tease you no more now; but remember that, though I am too old to expect to be a young lady's first choice, I never saw the woman whom I could so love, or of whom I could feel so sure that she would bring a blessing with her; and I do believe that, if you would trust me, I could make you happy. There! I ask no answer. I only shall think of my return next year, and not reckon on that. I know you will tell me whatever is true.' He pressed her hand, and would fain have smiled reassuringly.

He took leave much more kindly than Mary thought she deserved, and did not appear to be in low spirits. She feared that she had raised unwarrantable hopes; but the truth was, that Mr. Ponsonby had privately assured him that, though she could not yet believe it, poor girl! the young man in England would be married before many months were over to old Dynevor's niece. There would be no more difficulty by the time he came back, for she liked him heartily already, and was a sensible girl.

So Mr. Ward departed, and Mary was relieved, although she missed his honest manly homage, and sound wise tone of thought, where she had so few to love or lean on. She thought that she ought to try to put herself out of the way of her cousins at home as much as possible, and so she did not try to make time to write to Clara; and time did not come unsought, for her father's health did not improve; and when they returned to Lima, he engrossed her care almost entirely, while his young wife continued her gaieties, and Mary had reason to think the *saya y manto* disguise was frequently donned; but it was so much the custom of ladies of the same degree, that Mary thought it neither desirable nor likely to be effectual to inform her father, and incite him to interfere. She devoted herself to his comfort, and endeavoured to think as little as she heard of English cousins.

There was not much to hear. After returning home quite well, Lord Ormersfield was laid up again by the first cold winds, and another summer of German brunnens was in store for him and Louis. Lady Conway had taken a cottage in the Isle of Wight, where Walter found the Christmas holidays very dull, and showed that he could get into mischief as well without Delaford as with him, and finally was sent off in a sort of honourable captivity to James and Isabel, expecting that he would find it a great punishment. Instead of this, the change from luxury to

their hard life seemed to him a sort of picnic. He enjoyed the 'fun' of the waiting on themselves; had the freedom of Ormersfield park for sport, and at home, his sister, whom he had always loved and respected more than any one else. James had time to attend to him, and to promote all his better tastes and feelings; and above all, he lost his heart to his twin nieces. It was exceedingly droll to see the half quarrelsome coquetties between the three, and to hear Walter's grand views for the two little maidens as soon as he should be of age. James and Louis agreed that there could not be much harm in him, while he could conform so happily to such a way of life. Everything is comparative, and the small increase to James's income had been sufficient to relieve him from present pinching and anxiety in the scale of life to which he and Isabel had become habituated. His chaplaincy gave full employment for heart and head to a man so energetic and earnest; he felt himself useful there, and threw himself into it with all his soul; and, what was more wonderful, he had never yet quarrelled with the guardians; and the master told Mr. Calcott that he had heard Mr. Frost was a fiery gentleman, but he had always seen him particularly gentle, especially with the children in school. The old women could never say enough in his praise, and doted on the little brown fairy who often accompanied him.

There was plenty to be done at home—little luxury, and not much rest; but Isabel's strength and spirits seemed a match for all, in her own serene quiet way, and the days passed very happily.

Charlotte had a workhouse girl under her, who neither ate nor broke so vehemently as her predecessor. One night, when Charlotte sat mending and singing in the nursery, the girl came plodding up in her heavy shoes, saying, 'There's one wanting to see ye below.'

'One! Who can it be?' cried Charlotte, her heart bounding at the thought of a *dénouement* to her own romance.

'He looks like a gentleman,' said the girl, 'and he wanted not to see master, but Miss Arnold most particular.' More hopes for Charlotte. She had nearly made one bound down-stairs, but waited to lay awful commands on the girl not to leave the children on no account; then flew down, pausing at the foot of the stairs to draw herself up, and remember dignity and maidenliness. Alas for her hopes! It was Delaford! His whiskers still were sleek and curly; he still had a grand air; but his boots were less polished—his hat had lost the gloss—and he looked somewhat the worse for wear.

Poor Charlotte started back as if she had seen a wild beast in her kitchen. She had heard of his dishonesty, and her thoughts flew distractedly to her spoons, murder, and the children. And here he was advancing gracefully to take her hand. She jumped back, and exclaimed, faintly, 'Mr. Delaford, please go away! I can't think what you come here for!'

'Ah! I see, you have listened to the voice of unkind scandal,' said Mr. Delaford. 'I have been unfortunate, Miss Arnold—unfortunate and misunderstood—guilty never. On the brink of quitting for ever an ungrateful country, I could not deny myself the last sad satisfaction of visiting the spot where my brightest hours have been passed;' and he looked so pathetic, that Charlotte felt her better sense melting, and spoke in a hurry—

'Please don't, Mr. Delaford, I've had enough of all that. Please go, and take my best wishes, as long as you don't come here, for I know all about you.'

But the intruder only put his hand upon his heart, and declared that he had been misrepresented; and let a cruel world think of him as it might, there was one breast in which he could not bear that a false opinion of him should prevail. And there-with he reached a chair, and Charlotte found herself seated and listening to him, neither believing, nor wishing to believe him, longing that he would take himself away, but bewildered by his rhetoric. In the first place, he had been hastily judged; he had perhaps yielded too much to Sir Walter—but youth, &c.; and when Lady Conway's means were in his hands, it had seemed better—he knew now that it had been a weakness, but so he had judged at the time—to supply the young gentleman's little occasions, than to make an *écclat*. Moreover, if he had not been the most unfortunate wretch in the world, a few lucky hits would have enabled him to restore the whole before Lord Fitzjocelyn hurried on the inquiry; but the young gentleman thought he acted for the best, and Mr. Delaford magnanimously forgave him.

Charlotte could not follow through half the labyrinth, and sat pinching the corner of her apron, with a vague idea that perhaps he was not so bad as was supposed; but what would happen if her master should find him there? She never looked up, nor made any answer, till he began to give her a piteous account of his condition; how he did not know where to turn nor what to do; and was gradually beginning to sell off his 'little wardrobe to purchase the necessaries of life.' Then the contrast began to tell on her soft heart, and she looked up with a sound of compassion.

In the wreck of his fortunes and hopes, he had thought of her; he knew she had too generous a spirit to crush a wretch trodden down by adversity, who had loved her truly, and who had once had some few hopes of requital. Those were, alas! at an end; yet still he saw that 'woman, lovely woman, in our hours of ease—' And here he stumbled in his quotation; but the fact was, that his hopes being blasted in England, he had decided on trying his fortune in another hemisphere; but, unfortunately, he had not even sufficient means to pay for a passage of the humblest description, and if he could venture to entreat for a—in fact, a loan—it should be most faithfully and gratefully restored the moment the fickle goddess should smile on him.

Charlotte felt a gleam of joy at the prospect of getting rid of him on any terms. She belonged to a class who seldom find the golden mean in money matters, being either exceedingly close and saving, or else lavish either on themselves or other people. Good old Jane had never succeeded in saving; all her halfpence went to the beggars, and all her silver melted into halfpence, or into little presents; and on the receipt of her wages, she always rushed off to the shop like a child with a new shilling. Reading had given Charlotte a few theories on the subject, but her practice had not gone far. She always meant to put into the savings bank; but hiring books, and daintiness, though not finery, in dress, had prevented her means from ever amounting to a sum, in her opinion, worth securing. The spirit of economy in the household had so far infected her that she had, in spite of her small wages, more in hand than ever before; and when she found what Mr. Delaford wanted, a strange mixture of feelings actuated her. She pitied the change in his fortunes; she could not but be softened by his flattering sayings,—she could not bear that he should not have another chance of retrieving his character,—she knew she had trifled unjustifiably with his feelings, if he had any,—and she had a sense of being in fault. And so the little maiden ran up-stairs, peeped into her red-leather work-box, pulled out her bead-purse, and extracted therefrom three bright gold sovereigns, and ran down-stairs again, trembling at her own venturesomeness, afraid that their voices might be heard. She put the whole before Delaford, saying—

‘There—that is all that lays in my power. Don’t mention it, pray. Now, please go, and a happy journey to you.’

How she wished his acknowledgments and faithful promises were over! He did hint something about refreshment, bread-and-cheese and beer, fare which he used to despise as ‘decidedly low;’ but Charlotte was obdurate here, and at last he took his leave. There stood the poor, foolish, generous little thing, raking out the last embers of the kitchen fire, conscious that she had probably done the silliest action of her life, very much ashamed, and afraid of any one knowing it; and yet strangely light of heart, as if she had done something to atone for the past permission that she had granted him to play with her vanity.

‘Some day she might tell Tom all about it, and she did not think he would be angry, for he knew what it was to have nowhere to go, and to want to try for one more chance.’

CHAPTER XL

THE CRASH

Late and early at employ;
Still on thy golden stores intent;
Thy summer in heaping and hoarding is spent,
What thy winter will never enjoy.—SOUTHEY

'STITCH! stitch!' said James Frost, entering the nursery on a fine August evening, and finding his wife with the last beams of sunshine glistening on her black braids of hair, as she sat singing and working beside the cot where slept, all tossed and rosy, the yearling child. 'Stitch! stitch! If I could but do needlework!'

'Ah!' said Isabel, playfully, lifting up a sweeter face than had ever been admired in Miss Conway; 'if you will make your kittens such little romps, what would you have but mending?'

'Is it my fault? I am very sorry I entailed such a business on you. You were at that frock when I went to evening prayers at the Union, and it is not mended yet.'

'Almost; and see what a perfect performance it is, all the spots joining as if they had never been rent. I never was so proud of anything as of my mending capabilities. Besides, I have not been doing it all the time: this naughty little Fanny was in such a laughing mood, that she would neither sleep herself nor let the rest do so; and Kitty rose up out of her crib, and lectured us all. Now, don't wake them—no, you must not even kiss the twin cherries; for if they have one of papa's riots, they will hardly sleep all night.'

'Then you must take me away; it is like going into a flower-garden, and being told not to gather.'

'Charlotte is almost ready to come to them, and in the meantime here is something for you to criticize,' said she, taking from the recess of her matronly work-basket a paper with a pencilled poem, on the Martyrs of Carthage, far more terse and expressive than anything she used to write when composition was the object of the day. James read and commented, and was disappointed when they broke off short—

'Ah! there baby woke.'

'Some day I shall give you a subject. Do you know how Sta. Francesca Romana found in letters of gold the verse of the Psalm she had been reading, and from which she had been five times called away to attend to her household duties?'

'I thought you were never to pity me again—'

'Do you call that pitying you?'

'Worse,' said Isabel, smiling.

'Well, then, what I came for was to ask if you can put on your bonnet, and take a walk in the lanes this lovely evening.'

A walk was a rare treat to the busy mother, and with a

look of delight, she consented to leave her mending and her children to Charlotte. There seldom were two happier beings than that pair, as they wandered slowly, arm-in-arm, in the deep green lanes, in the summer twilight, talking sometimes of the present, sometimes of the future, but with the desultory, vague speculation of those who feared little because they knew how little there was to fear.

'It is well they are all girls,' said James, speaking of that constant topic, the children; 'we can manage their education pretty well, I flatter myself, by the help of poor Clara's finishing governess, as Louis used to call you.'

'If the edge of my attainments be not quite rusted off. Meantime, you teach Kitty, and I teach nothing.'

'You don't lose your singing. Your voice never used to be so sweet.'

'It keeps the children good. But you should have seen Kitty chaunting *Edwin and Angelina* to the twins this morning, and getting up an imitation of crying at "turn Angelina, ever dear," because, she said, Charlotte always did.'

'That is worth writing to tell Fitzjocelyn! It will be a great disappointment if they have to stay abroad all this winter; but he seems to think it the only chance of his father getting thoroughly well, so I suppose there is little hope of him. I should like for him to see Kitty as she is now, she is so excessively droll!'

'Yes; and it must be a great deprivation to have to leave all his farm to itself, just as it is looking so well; only he makes himself happy with whatever he is doing.'

'How he would enjoy this evening! I never saw more perfect rest!'

'Yes;—the sounds of the town come through the air in a hush! and the very star seems to twinkle quietly!'

They stood still without speaking to enjoy that sense of stillness and refreshment, looking up through the chestnut boughs that overshadowed the deep dewy lane, where there was not air enough even to waft down the detached petals of the wild rose.

'Such moments as these must be meant to help one on,' said James, 'to hinder daily life from running into drudgery.'

'And it is so delightful to have a holiday given, now and then, instead of having a life all holiday. Ah! there's a glow-worm—look at the wonder of that green lamp!'

'I must show it to Kitty,' said James, taking it up on a cushion of moss.

'Her acquaintance will begin earlier than mine. Do you remember showing me my first glow-worm at Beauchastel? I used to think that the gem of my walks, before I knew better. It is a great treat to have poor Walter here in the holidays, so good and pleasant; but I must say one charm is the pleasure of being alone together afterwards.'

'A pleasure it is well you do not get tired of, my dear, and I am afraid it will soon be over for the present. I do believe that is Richardson behind us! An attorney among the glow-worms is more than I expected.'

'Good evening, sir,' said the attorney, coming up with them; 'is Mrs. Frost braving the dew?' And then, after some moments, 'Have you heard from your sister lately, Mr. Frost?'

'About three weeks ago.'

'She did not mention then,' said Mr. Richardson, hesitating, 'Mr. Dynevor's health?'

'No! Have you heard anything?'

'I thought you might wish to be aware of what I learnt from, I fear, too good authority. It appears that Mr. Dynevor paid only a part of the purchase-money of the estate, giving security for the rest on his property in Peru; and now, owing to the failure of the Equatorial Steam Navigation Company, Mr. Dynevor is, I fear, actually insolvent.'

'Did you say he was ill?'

'I heard mentioned severe illness—paralytic affection; but as you have not heard from Miss Clara, I hope it may be of no importance.'

After a few more inquiries, and additional information being elicited, good nights were exchanged, and Mr. Richardson passed on. At first neither spoke, till Isabel said—

'And Clara never wrote!'

'She would identify herself too much with her uncle in his misfortune. Poor dear child! what may she not be undergoing!'

'You will go to her?'

'I must. Whether my uncle will forgive me or not, to Clara I must go. Shall I write first?'

'Oh, no; it will only make a delay, and your uncle might say "don't come."'

'Right; delay would prolong her perplexities. I will go to-morrow, and Mr. Holdsworth will see to the workhouse people.'

His alert air showed how grateful was any excuse that could take him to Clara, the impulse of brotherly love coming uppermost of all his sensations. Then came pity for the poor old man whose cherished design had thus crumbled, and the anxious wonder whether he would forgive, and deign to accept sympathy from his nephew.

'My dear,' said James, doubtfully; 'supposing, what I hardly dare to imagine, that he should consent, what should you say to my bringing him here?'

'I believe it would make you happy,' said Isabel. 'Oh! yes, pray do—and then we should have Clara.'

'I should rejoice to offer anything like reparation, though I do not dare to hope it will be granted; and I do not know how to ask you to break up the home comfort we have prized so much.'

'It will be all the better comfort for your mind being fully at ease; and I am sure we should deserve none at all, if we shut our door against him now that he is in distress. You must bring him, poor old man, and I will try with all my might to behave well to him.'

'It is a mere chance; but I am glad to take your consent with me. As to our affording it, I suppose he may have, at the worst, an allowance from the creditors; so you will not have to retrench anything.'

'Don't talk of that, dearest. We never knew how little we could live on till we tried; and if No. 12 is taken, and you are paid for the new edition of the lectures, and Walter's pay besides—'

'And Sir Hubert,' added James.

'Of course we shall get on,' said Isabel. 'I am not in the least afraid that the little girls will suffer, if they do live a little harder for the sake of their old uncle. I only wish you had had your new black coat first, for I am afraid you won't now.'

'You need not reckon on that. I don't expect that I shall be allowed the comfort of doing anything for him. But see about them I must. Oh, may I not be too late!'

Early the next morning James was on his way, travelling through the long bright summer day; and when, after the close, stifling railway carriage, full of rough, loud-voiced passengers, he found himself in the cool of the evening on the bare heath, where the slanting sunbeams cast a red light, he was reminded by every object that met his eye of the harsh and rebellious sensations that he had allowed to reign over him at his last arrival there, which had made him wrangle over the bier of one so loving and beloved, and exaggerate the right till it wore the semblance of the wrong.

By the time he came to the village, the parting light was shining on the lofty church tower, rising above the turmoil and whirl of the darkening world below, almost as sacred old age had lifted his grandmother into perpetual peace and joy, above the fret and vexation of earthly cares and dissensions. The recollection of her confident trust that reconciliation was in store, came to cheer him as he crossed the park, and the aspect of the house assured him that at least he was not again too late.

The servant who answered the bell said that Mr. Dynevor was very ill, and Miss Dynevor could see no one. James sent in his card, and stood in an agony of impatience, imagining all and more than all he deserved to have taken place—his uncle either dying, or else forcibly withholding his sister from him.

At last there was a hurried step, and the brother and sister were clasping each other in speechless joy.

'O Jem! dear Jem! this is so kind!' cried Clara, as with arms round each other they crossed the hall. 'Now I don't care for anything!'

'My uncle?'

'Much better,' said Clara; 'he speaks quite well again, and his foot is less numb.'

'Was it paralysis?'

'Yes; brought on by trouble and worry of mind. But how did you know, Jen?'

'Richardson told me. Oh, Clara, had I offended too deeply for you to summon me?'

'No, indeed,' said Clara, pressing his arm, 'I knew you would help us as far as you could; but to throw ourselves on you would be robbing the children, so I wanted to have something fixed before you heard.'

'My poor child, what could be fixed?'

'You gave me what is better than house and land,' said Clara. 'I wrote to Miss Brigham; she will give me employment in the school till I can find a place as daily governess, and she is to take lodgings for us.'

'And is this what it has come to, my poor Clara?'

'Oh, don't pity me! my heart has felt like an India-rubber ball ever since the crash. Even poor Uncle Oliver being so ill could not keep me from feeling as if the burthen were off my back, and I were little Clara Frost again. It seemed to take away the bar between us; and so it has! O, Jen! this is happiness. Tell me of Isabel and the babies.'

'You will come home to them. Do you think my uncle would consent?'

She answered with an embrace, a look of rapture and of doubt, and then a negative. 'Oh, no, we cannot be a burthen on you. You have quite enough on your hands. And, oh! you have grown so spare and thin. I mean to maintain my uncle, if—' and her spirited bearing softened into thoughtfulness, as if the little word conveyed that she meant not to be self-confident.

'But, Clara, is this actual ruin? I know only what Richardson could tell me.'

'I do not fully understand,' said Clara. 'It had been plain for a long time that something was on Uncle Oliver's mind; he was so restless all the winter at Paris, and at last arranged our coming home very suddenly. I think he was disappointed in London, for he went out at once, and came back very much discomposed. He even scolded me for not having married; and when I tried to coax him out of it, he said it was for my good, and he wanted to see after his business in Peru. I put him in mind how dear granny had begged him to stay at home; but he told me I knew nothing about it, and that he would have gone long ago if I had not been an obstinate girl, and had known how to play my cards. I said something about going home, but that made him more furious than ever. But, after all, it is not fair to tell all about the last few months. Dr. Hastings says his attack had been a long time coming on, and he must have been previously harassed.'

‘And you had to bear with it all?’

‘He was never unkind. Oh, no; but it was sad to see him so miserable, and not to know why—and so uncertain, too! Sometimes he would insist on giving grand parties, and yet he was angry with the expense of my poor little pony-carriage. I don’t think he always quite knew what he was about; and while he hoped to pull through, I suppose he was afraid of any one guessing at his embarrassments. On this day fortnight he was reading his letters at breakfast—I saw there was something amiss, and said something stupid about the hot rolls, because he could not bear me to notice. I think that roused him, for he got up, but he tottered, and by the time I came to him he seemed to slip down into my arms, quite insensible. The surgeon in the village bled him, and he came to himself, but could not speak. I had almost sent for you then, but Dr. Hastings came, and thought he would recover, and I did not venture. Indeed, Jane forbade me; she is a sort of lioness and her whelps. Well, the next day came Mr. Morrison, who is the Mr. Richardson to this concern, and by and by he asked to see me. He kept the doctor in the next room. I believe he thought I should faint or make some such performance, for he began about his painful duty, and frightened me lest my poor uncle should be worse, only he was not the right man to tell me. So at last it came out that we were ruined, and I was not an heiress at all, at all! If it had not been for poor Uncle Oliver, I should have cried “Hurrah!” I did nearly laugh to hear him complimenting my firmness. I believe the history is this:—Hearing that this place was for sale, brought Uncle Oliver home before his affairs could well do without him. He paid half the price, and promised to pay the rest in three years, giving security on the mines and the other property in Peru; but somehow the remittances have never come properly, and he trusted to some great success with the Equatorial Company to set things straight; but it seems that it has totally failed, and that was the news that overthrew him. Then the creditors, who had been put off with hopes, all came down on him together, and there seems to be nothing to be done but to give up everything to them. Poor Uncle Oliver!—I sat watching him that evening, and thinking how Louis would say the sea had swept away his whole sand castle with one wave.’

‘Does he know it? Have any steps been taken?’

‘Mr. Morrison showed me what my poor uncle had done. He had really executed a deed giving me the whole estate; he would have borne all the disgrace and persecution himself—for you know it would have been a most horrible scrape, as he had given them security on property that was not really secure. Mr. Morrison said the deed would hold, and that he would bring me counsel’s opinion if I liked. But, oh, Jem! I was so thankful that my birthday was over, and I was my own woman! I made him draw up a paper, and I signed it, undertaking that

they shall have quiet possession provided they will come to an amicable settlement, and not torment my uncle.'

'I hope he is a man of sense, who will make the best terms?'

'You may see to that now. I'm sure he is a man of compliments. He tells me grand things about my disinterestedness and the creditors; and they have promised to let us stay unmolested as long as I please, which will be only till my uncle can move, for I must get rid of all these servants and paraphernalia; and in the meantime they are concocting the amicable adjustment, and Mr. Morrison said he should try to stipulate for a maintenance for my uncle; but he was not sure of it, without giving up what may yet come from Peru. Jane's annuity is safe—that is a comfort! What work I had to make her believe it! and now she wants us all to live upon it.'

'That was a rare and beautiful power by which my grandmother infused such faithful love into all her dependents. But now for the person really to be pitied.'

'It was only three days ago that it was safe to speak of it, but then he had grown so anxious that the doctors said I must begin. So I begged and prayed him to forgive me, and then told what I had done, and he was not so very angry. He only called me a silly child, and said I did not know what I had done in those few days that I had been left to myself. So I told him dear granny had had it, and that was all that signified, and that I never had any right here. Then,' said Clara, tearfully, 'he began to cry like a child, and said at least she had died in her own home; and he called me Henry's child: and then Jane came and turned me out, and won't let me go near him unless I promise to be good and say nothing. But I must soon; for however she pats him, and says, "Don't, Master Oliver," I see his mind runs on nothing else; and the doctor says he may soon hear the plans, and be moved.'

'Can you venture to tell him that I am here?'

Before Clara could answer, Jane opened the door—'Miss Clara, your uncle;' and there she stopped, at the unexpected sight of the brother and sister still hand in hand. 'Here, Jane, do you see him?' cried Clara; and James came forward with outstretched hand, but he was not graciously received.

'Now, Master James, you ain't coming here to worrit your poor uncle?'

'No, indeed, Jane. I am come in the hope of being of some use to him.'

'I'd rather by half it had been Lord Fitzjocelyn,' muttered Jane; 'he was always quieter.'

'Now, Jane, you should not be so cross,' cried Clara, 'when it is your own Jemmy, come on purpose to help and comfort us all! You are going to tell Uncle Oliver, and make him glad to see him, as you know you are.'

'I know,' said James, 'that last time I was here, I behaved ill enough to make you dread my presence, Jane; but I have

learnt and suffered a good deal since that time, and I wish for nothing so much as for my uncle's pardon.'

Mrs. Beckett would have been more impressed, had she ever ceased to think of Master Jemmy otherwise than as a self-willed but candid boy; and she answered as if he had been throwing himself on her mercy after breaking a window, or knocking down Lord Fitzjocelyn—

'Well, sir, that is all you can say. I'm glad you are sorry. I'll see if I can mention it to your uncle.'

Off trotted Jane, while Clara's indignation and excited spirits relieved themselves by a burst of merry laughter, as she hung about her brother, and begged to hear of the dear old home.

The old servant, in her simplicity, went straight up-stairs, and up to her nursling, as he had again become. 'Master Oliver,' said she, 'he is come. Master Jem is come back, and 'twould do your heart good to see how happy the children are together—just like you and poor Master Henry.'

'Did she ask him here?' said Mr. Dynevor, uneasily.

'No, sir; he came right out of his own head, because he thought she would feel lost.'

Oliver vouchsafed no reply, and Jane pressed no farther. He never alluded to his guest; but when Clara came into the room, his eye dwelt on her countenance of bright content and animation, and the smiles that played round her lips as she sat silent. Her voice was hushed in the sick-room, but he heard it about the house with the blithe, lively ring that had been absent from it since he carried her away from Northwold; and her steps danced up-stairs, and along the galleries, with the light, bounding tread unknown to the constrained, dignified Miss Dynevor. All the notice he took that night was to say, petulantly, when Clara was sitting with him, 'Don't stay here; you want to be down-stairs.'

'Oh, no, dear uncle, I am come to stay with you. I don't want, in the least, to be anywhere but here.'

He seemed pleased, although he growled; and next morning Jane reported that he had been asking for how long his nephew had come, and saying he was glad that Miss Dynevor had some one to look after her—a sufferance beyond expectation. In his helpless state, Jane had resumed her nursery relations with him; and he talked matters over with her so freely that it was well that the two young people were scarcely less her children, and had almost an equal share of her affection, so that Clara felt that matters might be safely trusted in her hands.

Clara's felicity could hardly be described, with her fond affections satisfied by her brother's presence, and her fears of managing ill removed by reliance on him; and many as were the remaining cares, and great as was the suspense lest her uncle should still nourish resentment, nothing could overcome the sense of restored joy ever bubbling up, not even the dread that James might not bear patiently with continued rebuffs. But James

was so much more gentle and tolerant than she had ever known him, that at first she could not understand missing the retort, the satire, the censure which had seemed an essential part of her brother. She was always instinctively guarding against what never happened ; or if some slight demonstration flashed out, he caught himself up, and asked pardon before she had perceived anything, till she began to think marriage had altered him wonderfully, and almost to owe Isabel a grudge for having cowed his spirit. She could hardly believe that he was waiting so patiently in the guise of a suppliant, when she thought him in the right from the first ; though she could perceive that the task was easier now that the old man was in adversity, and she saw that he regarded his exclusion from his uncle's room in the light of a just punishment, to be endured with humility.

James, on his side, was highly pleased with his sister. Having only seen her as the wild, untamed Giraffe, he was by no means prepared for the dignity and decision with which Miss Dynevor reigned over the establishment. Her tall figure, and the simple, straightforward ease of her movements and manners, seemed made to grace those large, lofty rooms ; and as he watched her playing the part of mistress of the house so naturally in the midst of the state, the servants, the silver covers, and the trappings, he felt that heiress-ship became her so well, that he could hardly believe that her tenure there was over, and unregretted. ' Even Isabel could not do it better,' he said, smiling ; and she made a low curtsy for the compliment, and laughed back, ' I'm glad you have come to see my performance. It has been a very long, dull pageant ; and here comes Mr. Morrison, I hope with the last act.'

Morrison was evidently much relieved that Miss Dynevor should have some relative to advise with, since he did not like the responsibility of her renunciation, though owning that it was the only thing that could save her uncle from disgraceful ruin, and perhaps from prosecution ; whereas now the gratitude and forbearance of the creditors were secured, and he hoped that Mr. Dynevor might be set free from the numerous English involvements, without sacrificing his remaining property in Peru. The lawyer seemed to have no words to express to James his sense of Miss Dynevor's conduct in the matter, her promptitude and good sense having apparently struck him as much as her generosity, and there was no getting him to believe, as Clara wished, that the sacrifice was no sacrifice at all—nothing, as she said, but ' common honesty and a great riddance.' He promised to take steps in earnest for the final settlement with the creditors ; and though still far from the last act, Clara began to consider of hastening her plans. It was exceedingly doubtful whether Oliver would hear of living at Dynevor Terrace, and Clara could not be separated from him ; besides which, she was resolved that her brother should not be burthened, and she would give James no promises, conditional or otherwise.

Mr. Dynevor had discovered that Morrison had been in the house, and was obviously restless to know what had taken place. By and by he said to Jane, with an air of inquiry, 'Why does not the young man come near me?'

Mrs Beckett was too happy to report the invitation, telling 'Master Jem' at the same time that 'he was not to rake up nothing gone and past; there was quite troubles enough for one while.' Clara thought the same, and besides was secretly sure that if he admitted that he had been wrong in part, his uncle would imagine him to mean that he had been wrong in the whole. Their instructions and precautions were trying to James, whose chaplaincy had given him more experience of the sick and the feeble than they gave him credit for; and he was patient enough to amaze Clara and pacify Jane, who ushered him into the sick-chamber. There, even in his worst days, he must have laid aside ill-feeling at the aspect of the shrunk, broken figure in the pillowed arm-chair, prematurely aged, his hair thin and white, his face shrivelled, his eyelid drooping, and mouth contracted. He was still some years under sixty; but this was the result of toil and climate—of the labour generously designed, but how conducted, how resulting?

He had not learned to put out his left hand—he only made a sharp nod, as James, with tender and humble respect, approached, feeling that, now his grandmother was gone, this frail old man, his father's brother, was the last who claimed by right his filial love and gratitude. How different from the rancour and animosity with which he had met his former advances!

He ventured gently on kindly hopes that his uncle was better, and they were not ill taken, though not without fretfulness. Presently Oliver said, 'Come to look after your sister? that's right—good girl, good girl!'

'That she is!' exclaimed James, heartily.

'Too hasty! too great hurry,' resumed Oliver; 'she had better have waited, saved the old place,—never mind what became of the old man, one-half dead already.'

'She would not have been a Clara good for much if she had treated you after that fashion, sir,' said James, smiling.

He gave his accustomed snort. 'The mischief a girl let alone can do in three days, when once she's of age, and one can't stop her! Women ought never to come of age; ain't fit for it; undo all the work of my lifetime with a stroke of her pen!'

'For your sake, sir!'

'Pshaw! Pity but she'd been safe married—tied it up well with settlements then out of her power. Can't think what that young Fitzjocelyn was after—it ain't the old affair. Ponsonby writes me that things are to be settled as soon as Ward comes back.'

'Indeed!'

'Aye, good sort of fellow—no harm to have him in our concerns—I hope he'll look into the accounts, and find out what

Robson is at. After all, I shall soon be out there myself, and make Master Robson look about him. Mad to allow myself to stay—but I'll wait no longer. Morrison may put the fellows off—I'll give him a hint; we'll save the place, after all, when I once get out to Lima. If only I knew what to do with that girl!

James could not look at him without a conviction that he would never recover the use of his hand and foot; but this was no time to discourage his spirits, and the answer was—'My sister's natural home would be with me.'

'Ha! the child would like it, I suppose. I'd make a handsome allowance for her. I shall manage that when my affairs are in my own hands; but I may as well write to the mountains as to Ponsonby. Aye, aye! Clara might go to you. She'll have enough any way to be quite worth young Fitz-jocelyn's while, you may tell him. That mine in the San Benito would retrieve all, and I'll not forget—pray, how many children have you by this time?'

'Four little girls, sir,' said James, restraining the feeling which was rising in the contact with his uncle, revealing that both were still the same men.

'H'm! No time lost, however! Well, we shall see! Any way, an allowance for Clara's board won't hurt. What's your notion?'

James's notion was profound pity for the poor old man. 'Indeed, sir,' he said, 'Clara is sure to be welcome. All we wish is, that you would kindly bring her to us at once. Perhaps you would find the baths of service; we would do our utmost to make you comfortable, and we are not inhabiting half the house, so that there would be ample space to keep the children from inconveniencing you.'

'Clara is set on it, I'll warrant.'

'Clara waits to be guided by your wishes; but my wife and I should esteem it as the greatest favour you could do us.'

'Ha! we'll see what I can manage. I must see Morrison'—and he fell into meditation, presently breaking from it to say fretfully, 'I say, Roland, would you reach me that tumbler?'

Never had James thought to be grateful for that name! He would gladly have been Roland Dynevor for the rest of his days, if he could have left behind him the transgressions of James Frost! But the poor man's shattered thoughts had been too long on the stretch; and, without further ceremony, Jane came in and dismissed his nephew.

Clara hardly trusted her ears when she was told shortly after, by her uncle, that they were to go to Northwold. Roland wished it; and, poor fellow! the board and lodging were a great object to him. He seemed to have come to his senses now it was too late; and if Clara wished it, and did not think it dull, there she might stay while he himself was gone to Lima.

'A great object the other way,' Clara had nearly cried, in her indignation that James could not be supposed disinterested in an invitation to an old man, who probably was destitute.

Brother and uncle appeared to have left her out of the consultation; but she was resolved not to let him be a burthen on those who had so little already, and she called her old friend Jane to take counsel with her, whether it would not be doing them an injury to carry him thither at all. So much of Jane's heart as was not at Cheveleigh was at Dynevor Terrace, and her answer was decided.

'To be sure, Miss Clara, nothing couldn't be more natural.'

'Nothing, indeed; but I can't put them to trouble and expense.'

'I'll warrant,' said Jane, 'that I'll make whatever they have go twice as far as Charlotte ever will. Why, you know I keeps myself; and for the rest, it will be a mere saving to have me in the kitchen! There's no air so good for Master Oliver.'

'I see you mean to go, Jane,' said Clara. 'Now, I have to look out for myself.'

'Bless me, Miss Clara, don't you do nothing in a hurry. Go home quiet and look about you.'

Jane had begun to call Northwold home; and, in spite of her mournings over the old place, Clara thought she had never been so happy there as in her present dominion over Master Oliver, and her prospects of her saucepans and verbenas at No. 5.

Poor Oliver! what a scanty measure of happiness had his lifelong exertions produced! Many a human sacrifice has been made to a grim and hollow idol, failing his devotees in time of extremity! Had it not been thus with Oliver Dynevor's self-devotion to the honour of his family?

CHAPTER XLI

FAREWELL TO GREATNESS

Soon from the halls my fathers reared
Their scutcheons must descend—SCOTT

MR. HOLDSWORTH contrived to set James at liberty for a fortnight, and he was thus enabled to watch over the negotiation, and expedite matters for the removal. The result was, that the resignation of the estate, furniture, and of Clara's jewels, honourably cleared off the debts contracted in poor Mr. Dynevor's eagerness to reinstate the family in all its pristine grandeur, and left him totally dependent on whatever might be rescued in Peru. He believed this to be considerable, but the brother and sister founded little hopes on the chance; as, whatever there might be had been entangled in the Equatorial Company, and nothing could be less comprehensible than Mr. Robson's statements.

Clara retained her own seventy pounds per annum, which, thrown into the common stock, would, James assured her, satisfy him, in a pecuniary point of view, that he was doing no wrong to his children; though he added, that even if there had been nothing, he did not believe they would ever be the worse for what might be spent on their infirm old uncle.

Notice was sent to Isabel to prepare, and she made cordial reply that the two rooms on the ground-floor were being made ready for Mr. Dynevor, and Clara's own little room being set in order; Miss Mercy Faithfull helping with all her might, and little Kitty stamping about, thinking her services equally effectual.

Oliver was in haste to leave a place replete with disappointment and failure, and was so helpless and dependent as to wish for his nephew's assistance on the journey; and it was, therefore, fixed for the end of James's second week. No one called to take leave, except the curate and good Mr. Henderson, who showed Clara much warm, kind feeling, and praised her to her brother.

She begged James to walk with her for a farewell visit to her grandmother's other old friend. Great was her enjoyment of this expedition; she said she had not had a walk worth having since she was at Aix-la-Chapelle, and liberty and companionship compensated for all the heat and dust in the dreary tract, full of uncomfortable shabby-genteel abodes, and an unpromising population.

'One cannot regret such a tenantry,' said Clara.

Poor creatures!' said James. 'I wonder into whose hands they will fall. Your heart may be free, Clara; you have followed the clear path of duty; but it is a painful thought for me, that to strive to amend these festering evils, caused very likely by my grandfather's speculations, might have been my appointed task. I should not have had far to seek for occupation. When I was talking to the curate yesterday, my heart smote me to think what I might have done to help him.'

'It would all have been over now.'

'It *ought* not. Nay, perhaps my presence might have left my uncle free to attend to his own concerns.'

'I really believe you are going to regret the place!'

'After all, Clara, I was a Dynevor before my uncle came home. It might have been my birthright. But, as Isabel says, what we are now is far more likely to be safe for the children. I was bad enough as I was, but what should I have been as a pampered heir? Let it go.'

'Yes, let it go,' said Clara; 'it has been little but pain to me. We shall teach my poor uncle that home love is better than old family estates. I almost wish he may recover nothing in Peru, that he may learn that you receive him for his own sake.'

'That is more than I can wish,' said James. 'A hundred or

two a year would come in handily. Besides, I am afraid that Mary Ponsonby may be suffering in this crash.'

'She seems to have taken care of herself,' said Clara. 'She does not write to me, and I am almost ready to believe her father at last. I could not have thought it of her!'

'Isabel has always said it was the best thing that could happen to Louis.'

'Isabel never had any notion of Louis. I don't mean any offence, but if she had known what he was made of, she would never have had you.'

'Thank you, Clara! I always thought it an odd predilection, but no one can now esteem Fitzjocelyn more highly than she does.'

'Very likely; but if she thinks Louis can stand Mary's deserting him—'

'It will be great pain, no doubt; but once over, he will be free.'

'It never will be over.'

'That is young-ladyism.'

'I never was a young lady, and I know what I mean. Mary may not be all he thinks her, and she may be dull enough to let her affection wear out; but I do not believe he will ever look at any one again as he did after Mary on your wedding-day.'

'So you forbid him to be ever happy again!'

'Not at all, only in that one way. There are many others of being happy.'

'That one way meaning marriage?'

'I mean that sort of perfect marriage that, according to the saying, is made in heaven. Whether that could have been with Mary, I do not know her well enough to guess; but I am convinced that he will always have the same kind of memory of her that a man has of a first love, or first wife.'

'It may have been a mistake to drive him into the attachment, which Isabel thinks has been favoured by absence, leaving scope for imagination; but I cannot give up the hope that his days of happiness are yet to come.'

'Nor do I give up Mary, yet,' said Clara. 'Till she announces her defection I shall not believe it, for it would be common honesty to inform poor Louis, and in that she never was deficient.'

'It is not a plant that seems to thrive on the Peruvian soil.'

'No; and I am dreadfully afraid for Tom Madison. There were hints about him in Mr. Ponsonby's letters, which make me very anxious; and from what my uncle says, it seems that there is such an atmosphere of gambling and trickery about his office, that he thinks it a matter of course that no one should be really true and honest.'

'That would be a terrible affair indeed! I don't know for which I should be most concerned, Louis or our poor little Charlotte. But after all, Clara, we have known too many falsehoods come across the Atlantic, to concern ourselves about anything without good reason.'

So they talked, enjoying the leisure the walk gave them for conversation, and then paying the painful visit, when Clara tried in vain to make it understood by the poor old lady that she was going away, and that James was her brother. They felt thankful that such decay had been spared their grandmother, and Clara sighed to think that her uncle might be on the brink of a like loss of faculties, and then felt herself more than ever bound to him.

On the way home they went together to the church, and pondered over the tombs of their ancestry,—ranging from the grim, defaced old knight, through the polished brass, the kneeling courtier, and the dishevelled Grief embracing an urn, down to the mural arch enshrining the dear revered name of Catharine, daughter of Roland, and wife of James Frost Dynevor, the last of her line whose bones would rest there. Her grave had truly been the sole possession that her son's labours had secured for her; that grave was the only spot at Cheveleigh that claimed a pang from Clara's heart. She stood beside it with deep, fond, clinging love and reverence, but with no painful recollections to come between her and that fair, bright vision of happy old age. Alas! for the memories that her brother had sown to spring up round him now!

Apart from all these vipers of his own creating, James after all felt more in the cession of Cheveleigh than did his sister. These were days of change and of feudal feeling wearing out; but James, long as he had pretended to scorn 'being sentimental about his forefathers,' was strongly susceptible of such impressions; and he was painfully conscious of being disinherited. He might have felt thus, without any restoration or loss, as the mere effect of visiting his birthright as a stranger; but, as he received all humbly instead of proudly, the feeling did him no harm. It softened him into sympathy with his uncle, and tardy appreciation of his single-minded devotion to the estate, which he had won not for himself, but for others, only to see it first ungratefully rejected, and then snatched away. Then, with a thrill of humiliation at his own unworthiness, came the earnest prayer that it might yet be vouchsafed to him to tend the exhausted body, and train the contracted mind to dwell on that inheritance whence there could be no casting out.

Poor Oliver was fretful and restless, insisting on being brought down to his study to watch over the packing of his papers, and miserable at being unable to arrange them himself. Even the tenderest pity for him could not prevent him from being an exceeding trial; and James could hardly yet have endured it, but for pleasure and interest in watching his sister's lively good-humour, saucy and determined when the old man was unreasonable, and caressing and affectionate when he was violent in his impotence; never seeming to hear, see, or regard anything unkind or unpleasant; and absolutely pleased and gratified when her uncle, in his petulance, sometimes ungraciously

rejected her services in favour of those of 'Roland,' who, he took it for granted, must, as a man, have more sense. It would sometimes cross James, how would Isabel and the children fare with this ill-humour; but he had much confidence in his wife's sweet calm temper, and more in the obvious duty; and, on the whole, he believed it was better not to think about it.

The suffering that the surrender cost Oliver was only shown in this species of petty fractiousness, until the last morning, when his nephew was helping him across the hall, and Clara close at his side, he made them stand still beside one of the pillars, and groaned as he said, 'Here I waited for the carriage last time! Here I promised to get it back again!'

'I wish every one kept promises as you did,' said James, looking about for something cheerful to say.

'I had hope then,' said Oliver; and well might he feel the contrast between the youth, with such hopes, energies, and determination mighty within him, and the broken and disappointed man.

'Hope yet, and better hope!' James could not help saying.

'Not while there's such a rascal in the office at Lima,' cried Oliver, testily.

'Oh! Uncle Oliver, he did not mean that!' exclaimed Clara.

Mr. Dynevov grumbled something about parsons, which neither of them chose to hear; and Clara cut it short by saying, 'After all, Uncle Oliver, you have done it all! Dear grandmamma came back and was happy here, and that was all that signified. You never wanted it for yourself, you know, and my dear father was not here to have it. And for you, what could you have more than your nephew and niece to— to try to be like your children! And hadn't you rather have them without purchase than with?' And as she saw him smile in answer to her bright caress, she added merrily, 'There's nothing else to pity but the fir-trees and gold-fish; and as they have done very happily before without the Pendragon reign, I dare say they will again; so I can't be very sorry for them!'

This was Clara's farewell to her greatness, and cheerily she enlivened her uncle all the way to London, and tried to solace him after the interviews that he insisted on with various men of business, and which did not tend to make him stronger in health or spirits through the next day's journey.

The engine whistled its arriving shriek at Northwold. Happy Clara! What was the summer rain to her? Every house, every passenger, were tokens of home; and the damp, rain-mottled face of the Terrace, looking like a child that had been crying, was more welcome to her longing eyes than ever had been lake or mountain.

Isabel and little Catharine stood on the step; but as Mr. Dynevov was lifted out, the little girl shrank out of sight with a childish awe of infirmity. The dining-room had been made a very comfortable sitting-room for him, and till he was settled

there, nothing else could be attended to ; but he was so much fatigued, that it was found best to leave him entirely to Jane ; and Clara, after a few moments, followed her brother from the room.

As she shut the door, she stood for some seconds unobserved, and unwilling to interfere with the scene before her. Half-way up-stairs, James had been pulled down to sit on the steps, surrounded by his delighted flock. The baby was in his arms, flourishing her hands as he danced her ; Kitty, from above, had clasped him tightly round the neck, chattering and kissing with breathless velocity ; one twin in front was drumming on his knee, and shrieking in accordance with every shout of the baby ; and below, leaning on the balusters, stood their mother's graceful figure, looking up at them with a lovely smiling face of perfect gladness. She was the first to perceive Clara ; and, with a pretty gesture to be silent, she pointed to the stand of the Wedgwood jar, under which sat the other little maid, her two fat arms clasped tight round her papa's umbrella, and the ivory handle indenting her rosy cheek, as she fondled it in silent transport.

'My little Salome,' whispered Isabel, squeezing Clara's hand, 'our quiet one. She could not sleep for expecting papa, and now she is in a fit of shy delight ; she can't shout with the others ; she can only nurse his umbrella.'

Just then James made a desperate demonstration, amid peals of laughter from his daughters. 'We are stopping the way ! Get out, you unruly monsters ! Let go, Kitty—Mercy, I shall kick ! Mamma, catch this ball ;' making a feint of tossing the crowing Fanny at her.

Assuredly, thought Clara, pity was wasted ; there was not one too many. And then began the happy exulting introductions, and a laugh at little Mercy, who stood blank and open-mouthed, gazing up and up her tall aunt, as if there were no coming to the top of her. Clara sat down on the stairs, to bring her face to a level, and struck up a friendship with her on the spot, while James lifted up his little Salome, her joy still too deep and reserved for manifestation ; only without a word she nestled close to him, laid her head on his shoulder, and closed her eyes, as if languid with excess of rapture—a pretty contrast to her sisters' frantic delight, which presently alarmed James lest it should disturb his uncle, and he called them up-stairs.

But Clara must first run to the House Beautiful, and little Mercy must needs come to show her the way, and trotted up before her, consequentially announcing 'Aunt Cara.' Miss Faithfull alone was present ; and, without speaking, Clara dropped on the ground, laid her head on her dear old friend's lap, and little Mercy exclaimed, in wondering alarm, 'Aunt Cara naughty—Aunt Cara crying !'

'My darling,' said Miss Faithfull, as she kissed Clara's brow and stroked her long flaxen hair, 'you have gone through a great deal. We must try to make you happy in your poor old home.'

'Oh, no! oh, no! It is happiness! Oh! such happiness! but I don't know what to do with it, and I want granny!'

She was almost like little Salome; the flood of bliss in returning home, joined with the missing of the one dearest welcome, had come on her so suddenly that she was almost stifled, till she had been calmed and soothed by the brief interval of quiet with her dear old friend. She returned to No. 5, there to find that her uncle was going to bed, and Charlotte, pink and beautiful with delight, was running about in attendance on Jane. She went up straight to her own little room, which had been set out exactly as in former times, so that she could feel as if she had been not a day absent; and she lost not a moment in adding to it all the other little treasures which made it fully like her own. She looked out at the Ormersfield trees, and smiled to think how well Louis's advice had turned out; and then she sighed in the fear that it might yet be her duty to leave home. If her uncle could live without her, she must tear herself away, and work for his maintenance.

However, for the present, she might enjoy to the utmost, and she proceeded to the little parlour, which, to her extreme surprise, she found only occupied by the four children—Kitty holding the youngest upon her feet, till, at the new apparition, Fanny suddenly seated herself for the convenience of staring.

'Are you all alone here?' exclaimed Clara.

'I am taking care of the little ones,' replied Kitty, with dignity.

'Where's mamma?'

'She is gone down to get tea. Papa is gone to the Union; but we do not mean to wait for him,' answered the little personage, with an *air capable*, the more droll because she was on the smallest scale, of much less substance than the round fat twins, and indeed chiefly distinguishable from them by her slender neat shape; for the faces were at first sight all alike, brown, small-featured, with large dark eyes, and dark curly hair—Mercy with the largest and most impetuous eyes, and Salome with a dreamy look, more like her mother. Fanny was in a different style, and much prettier; but her contemplation ended in alarm and inclination to cry, whereupon Kitty embraced her, and consoled her like a most efficient guardian; then seeing Mercy becoming rather rude in her familiarities with her aunt, held up her small forefinger, and called out gravely, 'Mercy, recollect yourself!'

Wonders would never cease! Here was Isabel coming up with the tea-tray in her own hands!

'My dear, do you always do that?'

'No, only when Charlotte is busy; and,' as she picked up the baby, 'now Kitty may bring the rest.'

So, in various little journeys, the miniature woman's curly head rose above the loaf, and the butter-dish, and even the milk-jug, held without spilling; while Isabel would have set out

the tea-things with one hand, if Clara had not done it for her ; and the workhouse girl finally appeared with the kettle.

Was this the same Isabel whom Clara last remembered with her baby in her lap, beautiful and almost as inanimate as a statue ? There was scarcely more change from the long-frocked infant to the bustling important sprite, than from that fair piece of still life to the active house-mother. Unruffled grace was innate ; every movement had a lofty, placid deliberation and simplicity, that made her like a disguised princess ; and though her beauty was a little worn, what it had lost in youth was far more than compensated by sweetness and animation. The pensive cast remained, but the dreaminess had sobered into thought and true hope. Her dress was an old handsome silk, frayed and worn, but so becoming to her, that the fading was unnoticed in the delicate neatness of the accompaniments. And the dear old room ! It looked like a cheerful habitation ; but Clara's almost instant inquiry was for the porcelain Arcadians, and she could not think it quite as tidy and orderly as it used to be in old times, when she had been the only fairy Disorder. 'However, I'll see to that,' quoth she to herself. And she gave herself up to the happy tea-drinking, when James was welcomed by another tumult, and was pinned down by Kitty and Salome on either side—mamma making tea in spite of Fanny on her lap—Mercy adhering to the new-comer—the eager conversation—Kitty thrusting in her little oar, and being hushed by mamma—the grand final game at romps, ending with Isabel carrying off her little victims one by one to bed, and James taking the tea-tray down-stairs. Clara followed with other parts of the equipage, and then both stood together warming themselves, and gossiping over the dear old kitchen fire, till Isabel came down and found them there. And then, before any of the grand news was discussed, all the infant marvels of the last fortnight had to be detailed ; and the young parents required Clara's opinion whether they were spoiling Kitty.

Next, Clara found her way to the cupboard, brought the shepherd and shepherdess to light, looked them well over, and satisfied herself that there was not one scar or wound on either—nay, it is not absolutely certain that she did not kiss the damsel's delicate pink cheek—set them upon the mantelpiece, promised to keep them in order, and stood gazing at them till James accused her of regarding them as her penates !

'Why, Jem !' she said, turning on him, 'you are a mere recreant if you can feel it like home without them !'

'I have other porcelain figures to depend on for a home !' said James.

'Take care, James !' said his wife, with the fond sadness of one whose cup overflowed with happiness ; 'Clara's shepherdess may look fragile, but she has kept her youth and seen many a generation pass by of such as you depend on !'

'She once was turned out of Cheveleigh, too, and has borne

it as easily as Clara,' said James, smiling. 'I suspect her worst danger is from Fanny. There's a lady who, I warn you, can never withstand Fanny!'

Isabel took up her own defence, and they laughed on.

Poor Uncle Oliver! could he but have known how little all this had to do with Cheveleigh!

CHAPTER XLII

WESTERN TIDINGS

O lady! worthy of earth's proudest throne!
Nor less, by excellence of nature, fit
Beside an unambitious hearth to sit
Domestic queen, where grandeur is unknown—
Queen and handmaid lowly.—WORDSWORTH

A HOUSE in the Terrace was let, and the rent was welcome, and shortly after, Clara had an affectionate letter from her old school enemy, Miss Salter, begging her to come as governess to her little brother, promising that she should be treated like one of the family, and offering a large salary.

Clara was much afraid that it was her duty to accept the proposal, since her uncle seemed very fairly contented, and was growing very fond of 'Roland,' and the payment would be so great an assistance; but James and Isabel were strongly averse to it; and her conscience was satisfied by Miss Mercy Faithfull's discovery of a family at the Baths in search of a daily governess.

Miss Frost was not a person to be rejected, and in another week she found herself setting out to breakfast with a girl and three boys, infusing Latin, French, and geography all the forenoon, dining with them, sometimes walking with them, and then returning to the merry evening of Dynevior Terrace.

Mr. Dynevior endured the step pretty well. She had ascendancy enough over him always to take her own way, and he was still buoyed up by the hope of recovering enough to rectify his affairs in Peru. He was better, though his right side remained paralyzed, and Mr. Walby saw little chance of restoration. Rising late, and breakfasting slowly, the newspaper and visits from James wiled away the morning. He preferred taking his meals alone; and after dinner was wheeled out in a chair on fine days. Clara came to him as soon as her day's work was over; and, when he was well enough to bear it, the whole party were with him from the children's bed-time till his own. Altogether, the invalid-life passed off pretty well. He did not dislike the children, and Kitty liked anything that needed to be waited on. He took Clara's services as a right, but was a little afraid of 'Mrs. Dynevior,' and highly flattered by any attention from her; and with James his moods were exceedingly variable, and often very trying, but, in general, very well endured.

Peruvian mails were anticipated in the family with a feeling most akin to dread. The notice of a vessel coming in was the signal for growlings at everything, from the post-office down to his dinner; and the arrival of letters made things only worse. As Clara said, the galleons were taken by the pirates; the Equatorial Company seemed to be doing the work of Caleb Balderston's thunderstorm, and to be bearing the blame of a deficit such as Oliver could not charge on it. The whole statement was backed by Mr. Ponsonby, whose short notes spoke of indisposition making him more indebted than ever to the exertions of Robson. This last was gone to Guayaquil to attempt to clear up the accounts of the Equatorial Company, leaving the office at Lima in the charge of Madison and the new clerk, Ford; and Mr. Dynevor was promised something decisive and satisfactory on his return. Of Mary there was no mention, except what might be inferred in a postscript:—'Ward is expected in a few weeks.'

Mr. Dynevor was obliged to resign himself; and so exceedingly fractious was he, that Clara had been feeling quite dispirited, when her brother called her to tell her joyously that Lord Ormersfield and Louis were coming home, and would call in on their way the next evening. Those wretched children must *not* take her for a walk.

Nevertheless, the wretched children did want to walk, and Clara could not get home till half-an-hour after she knew the train must have come in; and she found the visitors in her uncle's room. Louis came forward to the door to meet her, and shook her hand with all his heart, saying, under his breath,

'I congratulate you!'

'Thank you!' she said, in the same hearty tone.

'And now look at him! look at my father! Have not we made a good piece of work of keeping him abroad all the winter? Does not he look as well as ever he did in his life?'

This was rather strong, for Lord Ormersfield was somewhat gray, and a little bent; but he had resumed all his look of health and vigour, and was a great contrast to his younger, but far older-looking, cousin. He welcomed Clara with his tone of courteous respect, and smiled at his son's exultation, saying, Fitzjocelyn deserved all the credit, for he himself had never thought to be so patched up again; and poor Oliver was evidently deriving as much encouragement as if rheumatism had been paralysis.

'I must look in at the House Beautiful,' said Louis, presently. 'Clara, I can't lose your company. Won't you come with me?'

Of course she came; and she divined why, instead of at once entering the next house, he took a turn along the Terrace, and, after a pause, asked, 'Clara, when did you last hear from Lima?'

'Not for a long time.' I suppose she is taken up by her father's illness.'

He paused, collected himself, and asked again, 'Have you heard nothing from your uncle?'

'Yes,' said Clara, sadly; 'but, Louis,' she added, with a lively tone, 'what does not come from herself I would not believe.'

'I do not.'

'That's right; don't be vexed when it may be nothing.'

'No; if she had found any one more worthy of her, she would not hesitate in making me aware of it. I ought to be satisfied, if she does what is best for her own happiness. Miss Ponsonby believes that this is a man of sterling worth, probably suiting her better than I might have done. She was a good deal driven on by circumstances before, and, perhaps, it was all a mistake on her side.' And he tried to smile.

Clara exclaimed that 'Mary could not have been all he had believed, if—'

'No,' he said, 'she is all, and more than all. I comprehend her better now, and could have shown her that I do. She has been the blessing of my life so far, and her influence always will be so. I shall always be grateful to her, be the rest as it may, and I mean to live on hope to the last. Now for the good old ladies. Really, Clara, the old Dynevor Terrace atmosphere has come back, and there seems to be the same sort of rest and cheering in coming into these old iron gates! After all, Isabel is growing almost worthy to be called Mrs. Frost.' And in this manner he talked on, up to the very door of the House Beautiful, as if to cheat himself out of despondency.

'That was a very pretty meeting,' said Isabel to her husband, when no witness was present but little Fanny.

'What, between his lordship and my uncle?'

'You know better.'

'My dear, your mother once tried match-making for Fitzjocelyn. Be warned by her example.'

'I am doing no such thing. I am only observing what every one sees.'

'Don't be so commonplace.'

'That's all disdain—you must condescend. I have been hearing from Mr. Dynevor of the excellent offers that Clara refused.'

'Do you think Uncle Oliver and Clara agree as to excellence?'

'Still,' continued Isabel, 'considering how uncomfortable she was, it does not seem improbable that she would have married, unless some attachment had steeled her heart and raised her standard. I know she was unconscious, but it was Fitzjocelyn who formed her.'

'He has been a better brother to her than I have been; but look only at their perfect ease.'

'Now it is my belief that they were made for each other, and can venture to find it out, since she is no longer an heiress, and he is free from his Peruvian entanglement.'

'Fanny, do you hear what a scheming mamma you have? I

hope she will have used it all upon Sir Hubert before you come out as the beauty of the Terrace !’

‘Well, I mean to sound Clara.’

‘You had better leave it alone.’

‘Do you forbid me ?’

‘Why, no ; for I don’t think you have the face to say anything that would distress her, or disturb the friendship which has been her greatest benefit.’

‘Thank you. All I intend is, that if it should be as I suppose, the poor things should not miss coming to an understanding for want—’

‘Of a Christmas-tree,’ said James, laughing. ‘You may have your own way. I have too much confidence in your discretion and in theirs to imagine that you will produce the least effect.’

Isabel’s imagination was busily at work, and she was in haste to make use of her husband’s permission ; but it was so difficult to see Clara alone, that some days passed before the two sisters were left together in the sitting-room, while James was writing a letter for his uncle. Isabel’s courage began to waver, but she ventured a commencement.

‘Mr. Dynevor entertains me with fine stories of your conquests, Clara.’

Clara laughed, blushed, and answered bluntly, ‘What a bother it was !’

‘You are very hard-hearted.’

‘You ought to remember the troubles of young ladyhood enough not to wonder.’

‘I never let things run to that length ; but then I had no fortune. But seriously, Clara, were all these people objectionable ?’

‘Do you think one could marry any man, only because he was not objectionable ? There was no harm in one or two ; but I was not going to have anything to say to them.’

‘Really, Clara, you make me curious. Had you made any resolution ?’

‘I know only two men whom I could have trusted to fulfil my conditions,’ said Clara.

‘Conditions ?’

‘Of course ! that if Cheveleigh was to belong to any of us, it should be to the rightful heir.’

‘My dear, noble Clara ! was that what kept you from thinking of marriage ?’

‘Wasn’t it a fine thing to have such a test ? Not that I ever came to trying it. Simple *no* answered my purpose. I met no one who tempted me to make the experiment.’

‘Two men !’ said Isabel ; ‘if you had said *one*, it would have been marked.’

‘Jem and Louis, of course,’ said Clara

‘Oh ! that is as good as saying *one*.’

'As good as saying *none*,' said Clara, with emphasis.

'There may be different opinions on that point,' returned Isabel, not daring to lift her eyes from her work, though longing to study Clara's face, and feeling herself crimsoning.

'Extremely unfounded opinions, and rather—'

'Rather what?'

'Impertinent, I was going to say, begging your pardon, dear Isabel.'

'Nay, I think it is I who should beg yours, Clara.'

'No, no,' said Clara, laughing, but speaking gravely immediately after; 'lookers-on do not always see most of the game. I have always known his mind so well that I could never possibly have fallen into any such nonsense. I respect him far too much.'

Isabel felt as if she must hazard a few words more—'Can you guess what he will do if Mr. Ponsonby's reports prove true?'

'I do not mean to anticipate misfortunes,' said Clara.

Isabel could say no more; and when Clara next spoke, it was to ask for another of James's wristbands to stitch. Then Isabel ventured to peep at her face, and saw it quite calm, and not at all rosy; if it had been, the colour was gone.

Thus it was, and there are happily many such friendships existing as that between Louis and Clara. Many a woman has seen the man whom she might have married, and yet has not been made miserable. If there be neither vanity nor weak self-contemplation on her side, nor trifling on his part, nor unwise suggestions forced on her by spectators, the honest, genuine affection need never become passion. If intimacy is sometimes dangerous, it is because vanity, folly, and mistakes are too frequent; but in spite of all these, where women are truly refined, and exalted into companions and friends, there has been much more happy, frank intercourse and real friendship than either the romantic or the sagacious would readily allow. The spark is never lighted; there is no consciousness, no repining, and all is well.

Fresh despatches from Lima arrived; and after a day, when Oliver had been so busy overlooking the statement from Guayaquil that he would not even take his usual airing, he received Clara with orders to write and secure his passage by the next packet for Callao.

'Dear uncle, you would never dream of it! You could not bear the journey!' she cried, aghast.

'It would do me good. Do not try to cross me, Clara. No one else can deal with this pack of rascals. Your brother has not been bred to it, and is a parson besides, and there's not a soul that I can trust. I'll go. What! d'ye think I can live on him and on you, when there is a competence of my own out there, embezzled among those ragamuffins?'

'I am sure we had much rather—'

'No stuff and nonsense. Here is Roland with four children already—very likely to have a dozen more. If you and he are fools, I'm not, and I *won't* take the bread out of their mouths. I'll leave my will behind, bequeathing whatever I may get out of the fire evenly between you two, as the only way to content you ; and if I never turn up again, why you're rid of the old man.'

'Very well, uncle ; I shall take my own passage at the same time.'

'You don't know what you are talking of. You are a silly child, and your brother would be a worse if he let you go.'

'If Jem lets you go, he will let me. He shall let me. Don't you know that you are never to have me off your hands, uncle ? No, no, I shall stick to you like a burr. You may go up to the tip-top of Chimborazo if you please, but you'll not shake me off.'

It was her fixed purpose to accompany him, and she was not solicitous to dissuade him from going, for she could be avaricious for James's children, and had a decided wish for justice on the guilty party ; and, besides, Clara had a private vision of her own, which made her dance in her little room. Mary had written in her father's stead—there was not a word of Mr. Ward—indeed, Mr. Ponsonby was evidently so ill that his daughter could think of nothing else. Might not Clara come in time to clear up any misunderstanding—convince Mr. Ponsonby—describe Louis's single-hearted constancy during all these five years, and bring Mary home to him in triumph ? She could have laughed aloud with delight at the possibility ; and when the other alternative occurred to her, she knit her brows with childish vehemence, as she promised Miss Mary that *she* would never be her bridesmaid.

Presently she heard Fitzjocelyn's voice in the parlour, and, going down, found him in consultation over a letter which Charlotte had brought to her master. It was so well written and expressed, that Louis turned to the signature before he could quite believe that it was from his old pupil. Tom wrote to communicate his perplexity at the detection of the frauds practised on his employers. He had lately been employed in the office at Lima, where much had excited his suspicion ; and, finally, from having 'opened a letter addressed by mistake to the firm, but destined for an individual, he had discovered that large sums, supposed to be required by the works, or lost in the Equatorial failure, had been, in fact, invested in America in the name of that party.' The secret was a grievous burthen. Mr. Ponsonby was far too ill to be informed ; besides that, he should only bring suspicion on himself ; and Miss Ponsonby was so much occupied as to be almost equally inaccessible. Tom had likewise reason to believe that his own movements were watched, and that any attempt to communicate with her or her father would be baffled ; and, above all, he could not endure

himself to act the spy and informer. He only wished that, if possible, without mentioning names, Charlotte could give a hint that Mr. Dynevor must not implicitly trust to all he heard.

James was inclined to suppress such vague information, which he thought would only render his uncle more restless and wretched in his helplessness, and was only questioning whether secrecy would not amount to deceit.

'The obvious thing for me is to go to Peru,' said Louis.

'My uncle and I were intending to go,' said Clara.

'How many more of you?' exclaimed James.

'I would not change my native land
For rich Peru and all her gold;'

chanted little Kitty from the corner, where she was building houses for the 'little ones.'

'Extremely to the purpose,' said Louis, laughing. 'Follow her example, Clara. Make your uncle appoint me his plenipotentiary, and I will try what I can to find out what these rogues are about.'

'Are you in earnest?'

'Never more so in my life.'

James beckoned him to the window, and showed him a sentence where Tom said that the best chance for the firm was in Miss Ponsonby's marriage with Mr. Ward, but that the engagement was not yet declared on account of her father's illness.

'The very reason,' said Louis, 'I cannot go on in this way. I must know the truth.'

'And your father?'

'It would be much better for him that the thing were settled. He will miss me less during the session, when he is in London with all his old friends about him. It would not take long, going by the Isthmus. I'll ride back at once, and see how he bears the notion. Say nothing to Mr. Dynevor till you hear from me; but I think he will consent. He will not endure that she should be left unprotected; her father perhaps dying, left to the mercy of these rascals.'

'And—forgive me, Louis—if you found her not needing you?'

'If she be happy, I should honour the man who made her so. At least, I might be of use to you. I should see after poor Madison. I have sent him to the buccaneers indeed! Good-bye! I cannot rest till I see how my father takes it!'

It was long since Louis had been under an excess of impetuosity; but he rode home as fast as he had ridden to Northwold to canvass for James, and had not long been at Ormersfield before his proposition was laid before his father.

It was no small thing to ask of the Earl, necessary as his son had become to him; and the project at first appeared to him senseless. He thought Mary had not shown herself sufficiently sensible of his son's merits to deserve so much trouble; and if she were engaged to Mr. Ward, Fitzjocelyn would find himself

in an unpleasant and undignified position. Besides, there was the ensuing session of Parliament! No! Oliver must send out some trustworthy man of business, with full powers.

Louis only answered, that of course it depended entirely on his father's consent; and by and by his submission began to work. Lord Ormersfield could not refuse him anything, and took care, on parting for the night, to observe that the point was not settled, only under consideration.

And consideration was more favourable than might have been expected. The Earl was growing anxious to see his son married, and of that there was no hope till his mind should be settled with regard to Mary. It would be more for his peace to extinguish the hope, if it were never to be fulfilled. Moreover, the image of Mary had awakened the Earl's own fatherly fondness for her, and his desire to rescue her from her wretched home. Even Mr. Ponsonby could hardly withstand Louis in person, he thought, and must be touched by so many years of constancy. The rest might be only a misunderstanding which would be cleared up by a personal interview. Added to this, Lord Ormersfield knew that Clara would not let her uncle go alone, and did not think it fit to see her go out in charge of an infirm paralytic; James could not leave his wife or his chaplaincy, and the affair was unsuited to his profession; a mere accountant would not carry sufficient authority, nor gain Madison's confidence; in fact, Fitzjocelyn, and no other, was the trustworthy man of business; and so his lordship allowed when Louis ventured to recur to the subject the next morning, and urge some of his arguments.

The bright clearing of Louis's face spoke his thanks, and he began at once to detail his plans for his father's comfort, Lord Ormersfield listening as if pleased by his solicitude, though caring for little until the light of his eyes should return.

'The next point is that you should give me a testimonial that I *am* a trustworthy man of business.'

'I will ride into Northwold with you, and talk it over with Oliver.'

Here lay the knotty point; but the last five years had considerably cultivated Fitzjocelyn's natural aptitude for figures, by his attention to statistics, his own farming-books, and the complicated accounts of the Ormersfield estate,—so that both his father and Richardson could testify to his being an excellent man of business; and his coolness and mildness of temper made him better calculated to deal with a rogue than a more hasty man would have been.

They found, on arriving, that James had been talking to Mr. Walby, who pronounced that the expedition to Lima would be mere madness for Mr. Dynevor, since application to business would assuredly cause another attack, and even the calculations of the previous day had made him very unwell, and so petulant and snappish, that he could be pleased with nothing, and treated

as mere insult the proposal that he should intrust his affairs to 'such a lad.'

Even James hesitated to influence him to accept the offer. 'I scruple,' he said, drawing the Earl aside, 'because I thought you had a particular objection to Fitzjocelyn's being thrown in the way of speculations. I thought you dreaded the fascination.'

'Thank you, James; I once did so,' said the Earl. 'I used to believe it a family mania; I only kept it down in myself by strong resolution, in the very sight of the consequences, but I can trust Fitzjocelyn. He is too indifferent to everything apart from duty to be caught by flattering projects, and you may fully confide in his right judgment. I believe it is the absence of selfishness or conceit that makes him so clear-sighted.'

'What a change! what a testimony!' triumphantly thought James. It might be partial, but he was not the man to believe so.

That day was one of defeat; but on the following, a note from James advised Fitzjocelyn to come and try his fortune again; Mr. Dynevor would give no one any rest till he had seen him.

Thereupon Louis was closeted with the old merchant, who watched him keenly, and noted every question or remark he made on the accounts; then twinkled his eyes with satisfaction as he hit more than one of the very blots over which Oliver had already perplexed himself. So clear-headed and accurate did he show himself, that he soon perceived that Mr. Dynevor looked at him as a good clerk thrown away; and he finally obtained from him full powers to act, to bring the villain to condign punishment, and even, if possible, to dispose of his share in the firm.

Miss Ponsonby was much relieved to learn that Lord Fitzjocelyn was going out, though fearing that he might meet with disappointment; but, at least, her brother would be undeceived as to the traitor in whom he was confiding. No letters were to announce Louis's intentions, lest the enemy should take warning; but he carried several with him, to be given or not, according to the state of affairs; and when, on his way through London, he went to receive Miss Ponsonby's commissions, she gave him a large packet, addressed to Mary.

'Am I to give her this at all events?' he asked, faltering.

'It would serve her right.'

'Then I should not give it to her. Pray write another, for she does not deserve to be wounded, however she may have decided.'

'I do not know how I shall ever forgive her,' sighed Aunt Melicent.

'People are never so unforgiving as when they have nothing to forgive.'

'Ah! Lord Fitzjocelyn, that is not your case. This might have been far otherwise, had I not misjudged you at first.'

'Do not believe so. It would have been hard to think me more foolish than I was.' This probation has been the best

schooling for me ; and, let it end as it may, I shall be thankful for what has been.'

And in this spirit did he sail, and many an anxious thought followed him, no heart beating higher than did that of little Charlotte, who founded a great many hopes on the crisis that his coming would produce. Seven years was a terrible time to have been engaged, and the little workhouse girl thought her getting almost as old as Mrs. Beckett. She wondered whether Tom thought so too ! She did not want to think about Martha's first cousin, who was engaged for thirty-two years to a journeyman tailor, and when they married at last, they were both so cross that she went out to service again at the end of a month. Charlotte set up all her caps with Tom's favourite colour, and 'turned Angelina' twenty times a day.

Then came the well-known Peruvian letters, and a thin one for Charlotte. Without recollecting that it must have crossed Lord Fitzjocelyn on the road, she tore it open the instant she had carried in the parlour letters. Alas ! poor Charlotte !

'I write to you for the last time, lest you should consider yourself any longer bound by the engagements which must long have been distasteful. When I say that Mr. Ford has for some months been my colleague, you will know to what I allude, without my expressing any further. I am already embarked for the U. S. My enemies have succeeded in destroying my character and blighting my hopes. I am at present a fugitive from the hands of so-called justice ; but I could have borne all with a cheerful heart if you had not played me false. You will never hear more of one who loved you faithfully.

'TH. MADISON.'

Poor Charlotte ! The wound was a great deal too deep for her usual childish tears, or even for a single word. She stood still, cold, and almost unconscious till she heard a step, then she put the cruel letter away in her bosom, and went about her work as usual.

They thought her looking very pale, and Jane now and then reproached her with eating no more than a sparrow, and told her she was getting into a dwining way ; but she made no answer, except that she 'could do her work.' At last, one Sunday evening, when she had been left alone with the children, her mistress found her sitting at the foot of her bed, among the sleeping little ones, weeping bitterly but silently. Isabel's kindness at length opened her heart, and she put the letter into her hand. Poor little thing, it was very meekly borne : 'Please don't tell no one, ma'am,' she said ; 'I couldn't hear him blamed !'

'But what does he mean ? He must be under some terrible error. Who is this Ford ?'

'It is Delaford, ma'am, I make no doubt, though however he

could have got there! And, oh, dear me! if I had only told poor Tom the whole, that I was a silly girl, and liked his flatteries now and then; but constant in my heart I always was!’

Isabel could not but suppose that Delaford, if it were he, might have exaggerated poor Charlotte’s little flirtation; but there was small comfort here, since contradiction was impossible. The U. S., over which the poor child had puzzled in vain, were no field in which to follow him up—he had not even dated his letter; and it was a very, very faint hope that Lord Eitzjocelyn might trace him out, especially as he had evidently fled in disgrace; and poor Charlotte sobbed bitterly over his troubles, as well as her own.

She was better after she had told her mistress, though still she shrank from any other sympathy. Even Jane’s pity would have been too much for her, and her tender spirit was afraid of the tongues that would have discussed her grief. Perhaps the high-toned nature of Isabel was the very best to be brought into contact with the poor girl’s character, which was of the same order; and many an evening did Isabel sit in the twilight, beside the children’s beds, talking to her, or sometimes reading a few lines to show her how others had suffered in the same way. ‘It is my own fault,’ said poor Charlotte; ‘it all came of my liking to be treated like one above the common; and it serves me right. Yes, ma’am, that was a beautiful text you showed me last night; I thought of it all day, and I’ll try to believe that good will come out of it. I am sure you are very good to let me love the children! I’m certain sure Miss Salome knows that I’m in trouble, for she never fails to run and kiss me the minute she comes in sight; and she’ll sit so quiet in my lap, the little dear, and look at me as much as to say, “Charlotte, I wish I could comfort you.” But it was all my own fault, ma’am, and I think I could feel as if I was punished right, so I knew poor Tom was happy.’

‘Alas!’ thought Isabel, after hearing Charlotte’s reminiscences; ‘how close I have lived to a world of which I was in utter ignorance! How little did we guess that, by the careless ease and inattention of our household, we were carrying about a firebrand, endangering not only poor Walter, but doing fearful harm wherever we went!’

CHAPTER XLIII

STEPPING WESTWARD

On Darien’s sands and deadly dew.—*Rokeby*

ENTERPRISE and speed both alike directed Fitzjocelyn’s course across the Isthmus of Panama, which in 1853 had newly become practicable for adventurous travellers. A canal con-

ducted him as far as Cruces, after which he had to push on through wild forest and swamp, under the escort of the muleteers who took charge of the various travellers who had arrived by the same packet.

It was a very novel and amusing journey, even in the very discomforts and the strange characters with whom he was thrown ; and more discontented travellers used to declare that Don Luis, as he told the muleteers to call him, always seemed to have the best success with the surly hotel-keepers, though when he resigned his acquisitions to any resolute grumbler, it used to be discovered that he had been putting up with the worst share.

A place called Guallaval seemed to be the most squalid and forlorn of all the stations—outside, an atmosphere of mosquitoes ; inside, an atmosphere of brandy and smoke ; the master an ague-stricken Yankee, who sat with his bare feet high against the wall, and only deigned to jerk with his head to show in what quarter was the drink and food, and to ‘guess that strangers must sleep on the ground, for first-comers had all the beds’—hammocks slung up in a barn, or unwholesome cupboards in the wall.

At the dirty board sat several of the party first arrived, washing down tough, stringy beef with brandy. Louis was about to take his place near a very black-bearded young man, who appeared more civilized than the rest, and who surprised him by at once making room for him, leaving the table with an air of courtesy ; and when, in his halting Spanish, he begged ‘his Grace’ not to disturb himself, he was answered, in the same tongue, ‘I have finished.’

After the meal, such as it was, he wandered out of the hut, to escape the fumes and the company within ; but he was presently accosted by the same stranger, who, touching his slouched Panama hat, made him a speech in Spanish, too long and fluent for his comprehension, at the same time offering him a cigar. He was civilly refusing, when, to his surprise, the man interrupted him in good English. ‘These swamps breed fever, to a certainty. A cigar is the only protection ; and even then there is nothing more dangerous than to be out at sunset.’

‘Thank you, I am much obliged,’ said Louis, turning towards the hut. ‘Have you been long out here ?’

‘The first time on the Isthmus ; but I know these sort of places. Pray go in, my lord.’

The title and the accent startled Louis, and he exclaimed, ‘You must be from the Northwold country ?’

He drew back, and said bluntly, ‘Never mind me, only keep out of this pestiferous air.’

But the abrupt surliness completed the recognition, and, seizing his hand, Louis cried, ‘Tom ! how are you ? You have turned into a thorough Spaniard, and taken me in entirely.’

‘Only come in, my lord ; I would never have spoken to you, but that I could not see you catching your death.’

'I am coming : but what's the matter ? Why avoid me, when you are the very man I most wished to see ?'

'I'm done for,' said Tom. 'The fellows up there have saddled their rogueries on me, and I'm off to the States. I—'

'What do you say ? There, I am coming in. Be satisfied, Tom ; I am come out with a commission from Mr. Dynevor, to see what can be arranged.'

'That's right,' cried Tom ; 'now poor Miss Ponsonby will have one friend.'

'Your letter to Charlotte brought me out—' began Louis ; but Madison broke in with an expression of dismay and self-reproach at seeing him walking somewhat lame.

'It is only when I am tired, and not thinking of it,' said Louis ; 'do you know that old ash stick, Tom, my constant friend ? See, here are the names of all the places I have seen cut out on it.'

'I knew it, and you, the moment you sat down by the table,' said Tom, in a tone of the utmost feeling, as Louis took his arm. 'You are not one to forget.'

'And yet you were going to pass me without making yourself known.'

'A disgraced man has no business to be known,' said Tom, low and hoarsely. 'No, I wish none of them ever to hear my name again ; and but for the slip of the tongue that came so naturally, you should not ; but I was drawn to you, and could not help it. I am glad I have seen you once more, my lord—'

He would have left him at the entrance, but Louis held him fast.

'You are the very man I depend on for unravelling the business. A man cannot be disgraced by any one but himself, and that is not the case with you, Tom.'

'No, thank Heaven,' said Tom, fervently ; 'I've kept my honesty, if I have lost all the rest.'

Little more was needed to bring Madison to a seat on a wooden bench beside Fitzjocelyn, answering his anxious inquiries. The first tidings were a shock—Mr. Ponsonby was dead. He had long been declining, and the last thing Tom had heard from Lima was, that he was dead ; but of the daughter there was no intelligence ; Tom had been too much occupied with his own affairs to know anything of her. Robson had returned from Guayaquil some weeks previously, and in the settlement of accounts consequent on Mr. Ponsonby's death, Tom had demurred giving up all the valuable property at the mines under his charge, until he should have direct orders from Mr. Dynevor or Miss Ponsonby. A hot dispute ensued, and Robson became aware that Tom was informed of his nefarious practices, and had threatened him violently ; but a few hours after he had returned, affecting to have learnt from the new clerk, Ford, that Madison's speculations required to be winked at with equal forbearance, and giving him the alternative of sharing the spoil, or of being denounced to the authorities. He had taken a night

to consider ; and, as Louis started at hearing of any deliberation, he said, sadly, ' You would not believe me, my lord, but I had almost a mind. They would take away my character, any way ; and what advantage was my honesty without that ? And as to hurting my employers, they would only take what I did not ; and such as that is thought nothing of by very many. I'd got no faith in man nor woman left, and I'd got nothing but suspicion by my honesty ; so why should I not give in to the way of the world, and try if it would serve me ? But then, my lord, it struck me that if I had nothing else, I had still my God left.'

Louis grasped his hand.

' Yes, I'm thankful that Miss Ponsonby asked me to read to the Cornish miners,' said Madison. ' One gets soon heathenish in a heathenish place ; and but for that I don't believe I should ever have stood it out. But Joseph's words, " How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God ? " kept ringing in my ears like a peal of bells, all night, and by morning I sent in a note to Mr. Robson, to say No to what he proposed.'

Every other principle would have cracked in such a conflict, and Louis looked up at Tom with intense admiration, while the young man spoke on, not conscious that it had been noble, but ashamed of owning himself to have been brought to a pass where mere integrity had been an effort.

He had gone back at once to his mines, in some hopes that the threats might yet prove nothing but blustering ; but he had scarcely arrived there when an Indian muleteer, to whom he had shown some kindness, brought him intelligence that *la justicia* was in quest of him, but in difficulties how to get up the mountains. The poor Indians guided his escape, conducting him down wonderful paths only known to themselves, hiding him in strange sequestered huts, and finally guiding him safely to Callao, where he had secretly embarked on board an American vessel bound for Panama. Louis asked why he had fled, instead of taking his trial, and confuting Robson ; but he smiled, and said my lord knew little of foreign justice ; besides, Ford was ready to bear any witness that Robson might put into his mouth ;—and his face grew dark. Who was this Ford ? He could not tell ; Mr. Robson had picked him up a few months back, when there was a want of a clerk ; like loved like, he supposed, but it was no concern of his. Would it be safe for him to venture back to Peru, under Fitzjocelyn's protection, and assist him in unmasking the treacherous Robson ? To this he readily agreed, catching at the hope of establishing his innocence, but declaring that he should then go at once to the States.—' What, not even go home to see Charlotte ! I've got a letter for you, when I can get at it.'

Tom made no answer, and Fitzjocelyn feared that, in spite of all his good qualities, his fidelity in love had not equalled his fidelity to his employers. He could not understand his *protégé* during the few days of their journey. He was a great

acquisition to his comfort, with his knowledge of the language and people, and his affectionate deference. At home, where all were courtly, he had been almost rude; but here, in the land of ill manners, his attentions were so assiduous that Louis was obliged to beg him to moderate them, lest they should both be ridiculous. He had become a fine-looking young man, with a foreign air and dress agreeing well with his dark complexion; and he had acquired much practical ability and information. Mountains, authority, and a good selection of books had been excellent educators; he was a very superior and intelligent person, and, without much polish, had laid aside his peasant rusticities, and developed some of the best qualities of a gentleman. But though open and warm-hearted on many points with his early friend, there was a gloom and moodiness about him, which Louis could only explain by thinking that his unmerited disgrace preyed on him more than was quite manly. To this cause, likewise, Louis at first attributed his never choosing to hear a word about Charlotte; but as the distaste—nay, almost sullenness, evoked by any allusion to her, became more apparent, Louis began unwillingly to balance his suspicions between some fresh attachment, or unworthy shame at an engagement to a maid-servant.

The poor little damsel's sweet blushing face and shy courtesy, and all her long and steady faithfulness, made him feel indignant at such a suspicion, and he resolved to bring Madison to some explanation; but he did not find the opportunity till after they had embarked at the beautiful little islet of Toboga for Callao. On board, he had time to find in his portmanteau the letter with which she had intrusted him, and, seeking Madison on deck, gave it to him. He held it in his hand without opening it; but the sparkle in his dark eye did not betoken the bashfulness of fondness, and Louis, taking a turn along the deck to watch him unperceived, saw him raise his hand as if to throw the poor letter overboard at once. A few long steps, and Louis was beside him, exclaiming, 'What now, Tom—is that the way you treat your letters?'

'The little hypocrite! I don't want no more of her false words,' muttered Tom, returning, in his emotion, to his peasant's emphatic double negative.

'Hypocrite! Do you know how nobly and generously she has been helping Mr. and Mrs. Frost through their straits? how faithfully—'

'I know better,' said Tom, hoarsely; 'don't excuse her, my lord; you know little of what passes in your own kitchens.'

'Too true, I fear, in many cases,' said Louis; 'but I have seen this poor child in circumstances that make me feel sure that she is an admirable creature. What misunderstanding can have arisen?'

'No misunderstanding, my lord. I saw, as plain as I see you, her name and her writing in the book that she gave to

Ford—her copying out of his love-poems, my lord, in the blank pages,—if I had wanted any proof of what he alleged.’

And he had nearly thrown the letter into the Pacific ; but Louis caught his arm.

‘Did you ever read *Cymbeline*, Tom?’

‘Yes, to be sure I have,’ growled Tom, in surprise.

‘Then remember Iachimo, and spare that letter. What did he tell you?’

With some difficulty Fitzjocelyn drew from Madison that he had for some time been surprised at Ford’s knowledge of Northwold and the neighbourhood ; but had indulged in no suspicions till about the epoch of Robson’s return from Guayaquil. Chancing to be waiting in his fellow-clerk’s room, he had looked at his books, and, always attracted by poetry as the rough fellow was, had lighted on a crimson watered-silk volume, on the first page of which he had, to his horror, found the name of Charlotte Arnold borne aloft by the two doves, and in the blank leaves, several extremely flowery poems in her own handwriting.

With ill-suppressed rage he had demanded an explanation, and had been met with provokingly indifferent innuendoes. The book was the gift of a young lady with whom Ford had the pleasure to be acquainted ; the little effusions were trifles of his own, inscribed by her own fair hands. Oh, yes ! he knew Miss Arnold very well—very pretty, very complaisant ! Ah ! he was afraid there were some broken hearts at home ! Poor little thing ! he should never forget how she took leave of him, after forcing upon him her little savings ! He was sorry for her, too ; but a man cannot have compassion on all the pretty girls he sees.

‘And you could be deceived by such shallow coxcombry as this !’ said Louis.

‘I tell you there was the book,’ returned Tom.

‘Well, Tom, if Mr. Ford prove to be the Ford I take him to be, I’ll undertake that you shall see through him, and be heartily ashamed of yourself. Give me back the letter,—you do not deserve to have it.’

‘I don’t want it,’ said Tom, moodily ; ‘she has not been as true to me as I’ve been to her, and if she isn’t what I took her for, I do not care to hear of her again. I used to look at the mountain-tops, and think she was as pure as they ; and that she should have been making herself the talk of a fellow like that, and writing so sweet to me all the time !—No, my lord, there’s no excusing it ; and ’twas her being gone after the rest that made it so bitter hard to me ! If she had been true, I would have gone through fire and water to be an honest man worthy of her ; but when I found how she had deceived me, it went hard with me to cut myself off from the wild mountain life that I’d got to love, and my poor niggers, that will hardly have so kind a master set over them.’

'You have stood the fiery ordeal well,' said Louis; 'and I verily believe that you will soon find that it was only an ordeal.'

The care of Tom was a wholesome distraction to the suspense that became almost agony as Louis approached Peru, and beheld the gigantic summits of the more northern Andes, which sunset revealed shining out white and fitfully, like the Pilgrim's vision of the Celestial City, although, owing to their extreme distance, even on a bright noonday, nothing was visible but clear deep-blue sky. They seemed to make him realize that the decisive moment was near, when he should tread the same soil with Mary; and yet, as he stood silently watching those glorious heights, human hopes and cares seemed to shrink into nothing before the eternity and Infinite Greatness of which the depth and the height spoke. Yet He remembereth the hairs of our heads, Who weigheth the mountains in the balance, and counteth the isles as a very little thing. Louis took comfort, but nerved himself for resignation; his prayer was more that he might bear rightly whatever might be in store, than that he should succeed. He could hardly have made the latter petition with that submissiveness and reserve befitting all entreaty for blessings of this passing world.

CHAPTER XLIV

RATHER SUDDEN

O! would you hear of a Spanish lady,
How she woo'd an Englishman?
Garments gay, as rich as may be,
Decked with jewels she had on.—*Old Ballad*

THE white buildings of Callao looked out of the palm gardens, and, with throbbing heart, Fitzjocelyn was set on shore, leaving Madison on board until he should hear from him that evening or the next morning.

Hiring a calesa, he drove at once to Lima, to the house of the late Mr. Ponsonby. The heavy folding-gates admitted him to the archway, where various negroes were loitering; and as he inquired for the ladies, one of them raised a curtain, and admitted him into the large cool twilight hall, so dark that, with eyes dazzled by the full glare of day, he could hardly discern at the opposite end of the hall, where a little more light was admitted from one of the *teatina* windows, two figures seated at a table covered with ledgers and papers. As if dreaming, he followed his barefooted guide across the soft India matting, and heard his Spanish announcement, that, might it please her Grace, here was a Señor from England.

Both rose; the one a well dressed man, the other—it was the well-known action—'Mary!' it was all that he had the power

to say ; he was hardly visible, but what tone was ever like that low, distinct, earnest voice ?

Mary clasped her hands together as if in bewilderment.

'Xavier should not—I will speak,' whispered her companion to her, and beginning, 'Address yourself to me, sir !'

But Mary sprang forward, signing him back with her hand.

'It is my cousin, Lord Fitzjocelyn !' she said, as if breath and effort would serve no more, and she laid her hand in that of Louis.

'Mr. Ward ?' said Louis, barely able to frame the question, yet striving for a manner that might leave no thorns behind.

'No ; oh, no ! Mr. Robson.'

The very sound of the 'No' made his heart bound up again, and his hand closed fast on that which lay within it, while a bow passed between him and Robson.

'And you are come ?' as if it were too incredible.

'I told you I should,' he answered.

'I will leave you, Miss Ponsonby,' said Robson ; 'we will continue our little business when you are less agreeably engaged.'

He began to gather the papers together, an action which suddenly recalled Louis to the recollection of Tom's cautions as to prudence and alertness, and he forced himself to a prompt tone of business.

'I hope to be able to be of use,' he said, turning to Mary. 'Mr. Dynevor has given me a commission to look into his affairs,' and he put into Robson's hands the letter written by James, and signed by Oliver.

'Thank you, Lord Fitzjocelyn, I shall be very happy to give any explanations you may wish,' said Robson, measuring with his eye his youthful figure and features, and piling up the books.

'I should prefer having these left with me,' said Louis ; 'I have but little time before me, and if I could look them over to-night, I should be prepared for you to-morrow.'

'Allow me. You would find it impossible to understand these entries. There is much to be set in order before they would be ready for the honour of your lordship's inspection.'

'I particularly wish to have them at once. You give me authority to act for you, Miss Ponsonby ?' he added, looking at her, as she stood holding by the table, as one half awake.

'Oh ! yes, I put the whole into your hands,' she answered, mechanically, obeying his eye.

'Allow me, my lord,' said Robson, as Fitzjocelyn laid the firm hand of detention on the heavy ledgers, and great leathern pocket-book.

'Yes ; we had better know exactly what you leave in my charge, Mr. Robson,' said Louis, beginning to suspect that the clerk fancied that the weight and number of the books and bundles of bills might satisfy his unpractised eye, and that the

essential was to be found in the pocket-book, on which he therefore retained a special hold; asking, as Robson held out his hand for it, 'Is this private property?'

'Why, yes; no; it is and it is not,' said Robson, looking at the lady, as though to judge whether she were attending. 'I only brought it here that Miss Ponsonby might have before her—always a satisfaction to a lady, you know, sir—though Miss Ponsonby's superior talents for business quite enable her to comprehend. But our affairs are not what I could wish. The Equatorial bubble was most unfortunate; and that unfortunate young man, who has absconded after a long course of embezzlement, has carried off much valuable property. I was laying the case before Miss Ponsonby, and showing her what amount had been fortunately secured.'

'What is in the pocket-book?' asked Louis of Mary; and, though she was apparently conscious of nothing around her, he obtained a direct reply.

'The vouchers for the shares.'

'In the Equatorial. Unlucky speculation—so much waste paper,' interrupted Robson. 'Your lordship had better let me clear away the trash, which will only complicate the matter, and distract your understanding.'

'Thank you; as you say there has been fraud, I should be better satisfied to be able to tell Mr. Dynevor that the papers have never been out of my hands. I will call on you early to-morrow.'

Mr. Robson waited to make many inquiries for Mr. Dynevor's health, and to offer every attention to Lord Fitzjocelyn, proposing to introduce him to the Consul, to find apartments for him, &c.; but at last he took leave, and Louis was free to turn to the motionless Mary, who had done nothing all this time but follow him with her eyes.

All his doubts had returned, and, in the crisis of his fate, he stood irresolute, daring neither to speak nor ask, lest feelings should be betrayed which might poison her happiness.

'Is it you?' were her first words, as though slowly awakening.

'It is I, come to be whatever you will let me be,' he answered, as best he could.

'Oh, Louis!' she said, 'this is too much!' And she hid her face in her hands.

'Tell me—one word, Mary, and I shall know what to do, and will not harass nor grieve you.'

'Grieve me! You!' exclaimed Mary, in an inexpressibly incredulous tone.

'Enough! It is as it was before!' and he drew her into his arms, as unresistingly as five years ago, and his voice sank with intense thankfulness, as he said, 'My Mary—my Mary! has He not brought it to pass?'

The tears came dropping from her eyes, and then she could speak.

'Louis, my dear father withdrew his anger. He gave full consent and blessing, if you still—'

'Then nothing is wanting—all is peace!' said Louis. 'You know how you are longed for at home—'

'That you should have come—come all this way! That Lord Ormersfield should have spared you!' exclaimed Mary, breaking out into happy little sentences, as her tears relieved her. 'Oh, how far off all my distress and perplexity seem now! How foolish to have been so unhappy when there you were close by! But you must see Doña Rosa,' cried she, recollecting herself, after an interval; 'I must tell her.'

Mary hurried into another room by a glass door, and Louis heard her speaking Spanish, and a languid reply; then returning, she beckoned to him to advance, whispering, 'Don't be surprised, these are the usual habits. We can talk before her, she never follows English.'

He could at first see no one, but presently was aware of a grass hammock swung from the richly-carved beams, and in it something white; then of a large pair of black eyes gazing full at him with a liquid soft stare. He made his bow, and summoned his best Spanish, and she made an answer which he understood, by the help of Mary, to be a welcome; then she smiled and signed with her head towards him and Mary, and said what Mary only interpreted by colouring, as did Louis, for such looks and smiles were of all languages. Then it was explained that only as a relation did she admit his Excellency el Visconde, before her evening toilette in her *duelos* was made—Mary would take care of him. And dismissing them with a graceful bend of her head, she returned to her doze and her cigarito.

Mary conducted Louis to the cool, shaded, arched doorway, opening under the rich marble cloister of the court-yard, where a fountain made a delicious bubbling in the centre. She clapped her hands—a little negro girl appeared, to whom she gave an order, and presently two more negroes came in, bringing magnificent oranges and pomegranates, and iced wine and water, on a silver tray, covered with a richly-embroidered napkin. He would have felt himself in the Alhambra, if he could have felt anything but that he was beside Mary.

'Sit down, sit down; you have proved yourself Mary enough already by waiting on me. I want to look at you, and to hear you. You are not altered!' he cried joyfully, as he drew her into the full light. 'You have your own eyes, and that's your very smile! only grown handsomer. That's all!'

She really was. She was a woman to be handsomer at twenty-seven than at twenty-one; and with the glow of unexpected bliss over her fine countenance, it did not need a lover's eye to behold her as something better than beautiful.

And for her! who shall tell the marvel of scarcely-credited joy, every time she heard the music of his softly-dropped distinct words, and looked up at the beloved face, perhaps a little

less fair, with rather less of the boyish delicacy of feature, but more noble, more defined—as soft and sweet as ever, but with all the indecision gone; all that expression that had at times seemed like weakness. He was not the mere lad she had loved with a guiding motherly love, but a man to respect and rely on—ready, collected, dealing with easy coolness with the person who had domineered over that house for years. He was all, and more than all, her fondest fancy had framed; and coming to her aid at the moment of her utmost difficulty, brought to her by the love which she had not dared to confide in nor encourage! No wonder that she feared to move, lest she should find herself awakened from a dream too happy to last.

‘But oh, Louis,’ said she, as if it were almost a pledge of reality to recollect a vexation, ‘I must tell you first, for it will grieve you, and we did not take pains enough to keep him out of temptation. That unhappy runaway clerk—’

‘Is safe at Callao,’ said Louis, ‘and is to help me to release you from the meshes they have woven round you. Save for the warning he sent home, I could never have shown cause for coming to you, Mary, while you would not summon me. That was too bad, you know, since you had the consent.’

‘That was only just at last,’ faltered Mary. ‘It was so kind of him, for I had disappointed him so much!’

‘What? I know, Mary; his letters kept me in a perpetual fright for the last year; and not one did you write to poor little Clara to comfort us.’

‘It was not right in me,’ said Mary; ‘but I thought it might be so much better for you if you were never put in mind of me. I beg your pardon, Louis.’

‘We should have trusted each other better, if people would have let us alone,’ said Louis. ‘In fact, it was trust after all. It always came back again, if it were scared away for a moment.’

‘Till I began to doubt if I were doing what was kind by you,’ said Mary. ‘Oh, that was the most distressing time of all; I thought if I were out of the way, you might begin to be happy, and I tried to leave off thinking about you.’

‘Am I to thank you?’

‘I *could* not,—that is the truth of it,’ said Mary. ‘I was able to keep you out of my mind enough, I hope, for it not to be wrong; but as to putting any one else there—I was forced at last to tell poor papa so, when he wanted to send for Mr. Ward; and then—he said that if you had been as constant, he supposed it must be, and he hoped we should be happy; and he said you had been a pet of my mother, and that Lord Ormersfield had been a real friend to her. It was so kind of him, for I know it would have been the greatest relief to his mind to leave things in Mr. Ward’s charge.’

Mary had been so much obliged to be continually mentioning her father, that, though the loss was still very recent, she was habituated to speak of him with firmness; and it was an extreme

satisfaction to tell all her sorrows, and all the little softening incidents, to Louis. Mr. Ponsonby had shown much affection and gratitude to her during the few closing days of his illness, and had manifested some tokens of repentance for his past life ; but there had been so much pain and torpor, that there had been little space for reflection, and the long previous decline had not been accepted as a warning. Perhaps the intensity of Mary's prayers had been returned into her bosom, in the strong blindness of filial love ; for as she dwelt fondly on the few signs of better things, the narration fell mournfully on Louis's ears, as that of an unhopeful deathbed.

An exceeding unwillingness to contemplate death, had prevented Mr. Ponsonby from making a new will. By one made many years back, he had left the whole of his property, without exception, to his daughter, his first wife having been provided for by her marriage settlements ; and now, with characteristic indolence and selfishness, he had deferred till too late the securing any provision for his Limenian wife ; and only when he found himself dying, had he said to Mary, ' You will take care to provide for poor Rosita ! '

So Mary had found herself heiress to a share in the miserably-involved affairs of Dynevor and Ponsonby ; and as soon as she could think of the future at all, had formed the design of settling Rosita in a convent with a pension, and going herself to England.

But Rosita was not easily to be induced to give up her gaieties for a convent life ; and, moreover, there was absolutely such a want of ready money, that Mary did not see how to get home, though Robson assured her there was quite enough to live upon as they were at present. Nor was it possible to dispose of the mines and other property without Mr. Dynevor's consent, and he might not be in a state to give it.

The next stroke was young Madison's sudden disappearance, and the declaration by Robson that he had carried off a great deal of property—a disappointment to her even greater than the loss. Robson was profuse in compliments and attentions, but continually deferred the statement of affairs that he had promised ; and Mary could not bear to accept the help of Mr. Ward, the only person at hand able and willing to assist her. She had at last grown desperate, and, resolved to have something positive to write to Mr. Dynevor, as well as not to go on living without knowing her means, she had insisted on Robson bringing his accounts.

She knew just enough to be dissatisfied with his vague statements ; and the more he praised her sagacity, the more she saw that he was taking advantage of her ignorance, which he presumed to be far greater than it really was. At the very moment when she was most persuaded of his treachery, and felt the most lonely and desolate—when he was talking fluently, and she was seeking to rally her spirits, and discover the path of

right judgment, where the welfare of so many was concerned—it was then that Fitzjocelyn's voice was in her ear.

She had scarcely explained to Louis why his coming was, if possible, doubly and trebly welcome, when the negro admitted another guest, whom Rosita received much as she had done his predecessor, only with less curiosity. Mary rose, blushing deeply, and crossing the room held out her hand, and said simply, but with something of apology, 'Mr. Ward, this is Lord Fitzjocelyn.'

Mr. Ward raised his eyes to her face for one moment. 'I understand,' he said, in a low, not quite steady voice. 'It is well. Will you present me?' he added, as though collecting himself like a brave man after a blow.

'Here is my kindest friend,' she said, as she conducted him to Louis, and they shook hands in the very manner she wished to see, learning mutual esteem from her tone and each other's aspect.

'I am sorry to have intruded,' said Mr. Ward. 'I came in the hope that you might find some means of making me of use to you; and, perhaps, I may yet be of some assistance to Lord Fitzjocelyn.'

He enforced the proposal with so much cordiality, and showed so plainly that it would be his chief pleasure and consolation to do anything for Miss Ponsonby, that they did not scruple to take him into their counsels; and Mary looked on with exulting wonder at the ability and readiness displayed by Louis in the discussion of business details, even with a man whose profession they were. In remote space, almost beyond memory, save to enhance the present joy of full reliance, was the old uncomfortable sense of his leaning too much upon her. To have him acting and thinking for her, and with one touch carrying off her whole burthen of care, was comfort and gladness beyond what she had even devised in imagination. The only drawback, besides compassion for Mr. Ward, was the shock of hearing of the extent of the treachery of Robson, in whom her father had trusted so implicitly, and to whom he had shown so much favour.

They agreed that they would go to the Consul, and concert measures; Mary only begging that Robson might not be hardly dealt with; and they went away, leaving her to her overwhelming happiness, which began to become incredible as soon as Louis was out of sight.

By and by, he came back to the evening meal, when Rosita appeared, with her uncovered hair in two long, unadorned tresses, plaited, and hanging down on each shoulder, and arrayed in black robes, which, by their weight and coarseness, recalled Eastern fashions of mourning, which Spain derived from the Moors. She attempted a little Spanish talk with El Visconde, much to his inconvenience, though he was too joyous not to be doubly good-natured, especially as he pitied her, and regarded her as a very perplexing charge newly laid on him.

He had time to tell Mary that he was to sleep at the Consul's,

whence he had sent a note and a messenger to fetch Tom Madison, since it appeared that the prosecution, the rumour of which had frightened the poor fellow away, had not been actually set on foot before he decamped ; and even if it had been, there were many under worse imputations at large in the Peruvian Republic.

Fitzjocelyn had appointed that Robson should call on him early in the morning, and, if he failed to detect him, intended to confront him with Madison before the Consul, when there could be little doubt that his guilt would be brought home to him. He found that the Consul and Mr. Ward had both conceived a bad opinion of Robson, and had wondered at the amount of confidence reposed in him ; whereas Madison had been remarked as a young man of more than average intelligence and steadiness, entirely free from that vice of gambling which was the bane of all classes in Spanish South America. Mary sighed as she heard Louis speak so innocently of 'all classes'—it was too true, as he would find to his cost, when he came to look into their affairs, and learn what Rosita had squandered. Next, he asked about the other clerk, Ford, of whom Mary knew very little, except that she had heard Robson mention to her father, when preparing to set out for Guayaquil, that in the consequent press of business he had engaged a new assistant, who had come from Rio as servant to a traveller. She had sometimes heard Robson speak in praise of his acquisition, and exalt him above Madison ; and once or twice she had seen him, and fancied him like some one whom she had known somewhere ; but she had for many months seldom left her father's room, and knew little of what passed beyond it.

Louis took his leave early, as he had to examine his prize, the pocket-book, and make up his case before confronting Robson ; and he told Mary that he should refrain from seeing her on the morrow until the 'tug of war should be over.' 'Mr. Ward promises to come to help me,' he added. 'Really, Mary, I never saw a more generous or considerate person. I am constantly on the point of begging his pardon.'

'I must thank him some way or other,' said Mary ; 'his forbearance has been beautiful. I only wish he would have believed me, for I always told him the plain truth. It would have spared him something ; but nobody would trust my account of you.'

The morning came, and with it Madison ; but patient as Fitzjocelyn usually was, he was extremely annoyed at finding his precious time wasted by Robson's delay in keeping his appointment. After allowing for differing clocks, for tropical habits, and every other imaginable excuse for unpunctuality, he decided that there must have been some mistake, and set off to call at the counting-house.

A black porter opened the door, and he stepped forward into the inner room, where, leaning lazily back before a desk, smoking

a cigar over his newspaper, arrayed in a loose white jacket, with open throat and slippers on feet, reposed a gentleman, much transformed from the spruce butler, but not difficult of recognition. He started to his feet with equal alacrity and consternation, and bowed, not committing himself until he should see whether he were actually known to his lordship. Fitzjocelyn was in too great haste to pause on this matter, and quickly acknowledging the salutation, as if that of a stranger, demanded where Mr. Robson was.

In genuine surprise and alarm, Ford exclaimed that he had not seen him; he thought he was gone to meet his lordship at the Consular residence. No! could he be at his own house? It was close by, and the question was asked, but the Señor Robson had gone out in the very early morning. Ford looked paler and paler; and while Louis said he would go and inquire for him at Miss Ponsonby's, offered to go down to the Consul's to see if he had arrived there in the meantime.

Mary came to meet Louis in the *sala*, saying that she was afraid that they had not shown sufficient consideration for poor Doña Rosa, who really had feeling; she had gone early to her convent, and had not yet returned, though she had been absent two hours.

Louis had but just explained his perplexity and vexation, when the old negro Xavier came in with looks of alarm, begging to know whether La Señora were come in, and excusing himself for having lost sight of her. She had not gone to the convent, but to the cathedral; and he, kneeling in the crowded nave while she passed on to one of the side chapels, had not seen her again, and, after waiting far beyond the usual duration of her devotions, had supposed that she had gone home unattended.

As he finished his story, there was a summons to Lord Fitzjocelyn to speak to Mr. Ford; and on Mary's desiring that he should be admitted, he came forward, exclaiming, 'My lord, he has not been at the Consul's! I beg to state that he has the keys of all the valuables at the office; nothing is in my charge.'

Louis turned to consult Mary; but, as if a horrible idea had come over her, she was already speeding through the door of the *quadra*, and appearing there again in a few seconds, she beckoned him, with a countenance of intense dismay, and whispered under her breath, 'Louis! Louis! her jewels are gone! Poor thing! poor thing! what will become of her?'

Mary had more reasons for her frightful suspicion than she would detain him to hear. Robson, always polite, had been especially so to the young Limenian; she had been much left to his society, and Mary had more than once fancied that they were more at ease in her own absence. She was certain that the *saya y manto* had been frequently employed to enable Rosita to enjoy dissipation, when her husband's condition would have rendered her public appearance impossible; and at the Opera or on the Alameda, Robson might have had every opportunity

of paying her attention, and forwarding her amusements. There could be no doubt that she had understood more of their plans than had been supposed, had warned him, and shared his flight.

Pursuit, capture, and a nunnery would be far greater kindness to the poor childish being than leaving her to the mercy of a runaway swindler ; and all measures were promptly taken, Ford throwing himself into the chase with greater ardour and indignation than even Madison ; for he had trusted to Robson's grand professions that he could easily throw dust into the young lord's inexperienced eyes, come off with flying colours, and protect his subordinate. If he had changed his mind since the Señora's warning, he had not thought it necessary to inform his confederate ; and Ford was not only furious at the desertion, but anxious to make a merit of his zeal, and encouraged by having as yet seen no sign that he was recognized.

Regardless of heat and fatigue, Fitzjocelyn, Mr. Ward, and the two clerks, were indefatigable throughout the day ; but it was not till near sunset that a Spanish agent of Mr. Ward's brought back evidence that a Limenian lady and English gentleman had been hastily married by a village *padre* in the early morning ; and Madison shortly after came from Callao, having traced such a pair to an American vessel, which was long since out of harbour. It was well that the pocket-book had been saved, for it contained securities to a large amount, which Robson, after showing to Mary to satisfy her, doubtless intended to keep in hand for such a start as the present. Without it, he had contrived, as Madison knew, to secure quite sufficient to remove any anxieties as to Doña Rosa owning a fair share of her late husband's property.

The day of terrible anxiety made it a relief to Mary to have any certainty, though she was infinitely shocked at the tidings, which Louis conveyed to her at once. Mrs. Willis, whom Mr. Ward had sent to be her companion, went to her brother in the outer room, and left the lovers alone in the *quadra*, where Mary could freely express her grief and disappointment, her sorrow for the insult to her father, and her apprehensions for the poor fugitive herself, whom she loved enough to lament for exceedingly, and to recall every excuse that could be found in a wretched education, a miserable state of society, a childish mind, and religion presented to her in a form that did nothing to make it less childish.

Mary's first recovery from the blow was shown by her remembering how fatigued and heated Louis must be ; and when she had given orders for refreshment for him, and had thus resumed something of her ordinary frame, he sat looking at her anxiously, and presently said, 'And what will you do next, Mary ?'

'I cannot tell. Mrs. Willis and Mrs. — have both been asking me very kindly to come to them, but I cannot let Mrs. Willis stay with me away from her children. Yet it seems

hard on Mr. Ward that you should be coming to me there. I suppose I must go to Mrs. —; but I waited to consult you. I had rather be at home, if it were right.'

'It may easily be made right,' quietly said Louis.

'How?' asked Mary.

'I find,' he continued, 'that the whole affair may be easily settled, if you will give me authority.'

'I thought I had given you authority to act in my name.'

'It might be simplified.'

'Shall I sign my name?'

'Yes—once—to make mine yours. If your claims are mine, I can take much better care of the Dynevor interest.'

Mary rested her cheek on her hand, and looked at him with her grave steady face, not very much discomposed after the first glimpse of his meaning.

'Will you, Mary?'

'You know I will,' she said.

'Then there is no time to be lost. Let it be to-morrow. Yes'—going on in the quiet deliberate tone that made it so difficult to interrupt him—'then I could, in my own person, negotiate for the sale of the mines. I find there is an offer that Robson kept secret. I could wind up the accounts, see what can be saved for the Northwold people, and take you safe home by the end of a fortnight.'

'Oh, Louis!' cried Mary, almost sobbing, 'this will not do. I cannot entangle you in our ruinous affairs.'

'Insufficient objections are consent,' said Louis, smiling.

'Do you trust me, Mary?'

'It is of no use to ask.'

'You think I am not to be trusted with affairs that have become my own? I believe I am, Mary. You know I must do my utmost for the Dynevors; and I assure you I see my way. I have no reasonable doubt of clearing off all future liabilities. You mean to let me arrange?'

'Yes; but—'

'Then why not obviate all awkward situations at once?'

'My father! You should not ask it, Louis.'

'I would not hasten you, but for the sake of my own father, Mary. He is growing old, and I could not have left him for anything but the hope of bringing him his own chosen daughter. I want you to help me take care of him, and we must not leave him alone to the long evenings and cold winds.'

Mary was yielding—'I must not keep you from him,' she said, 'but to-morrow—a Sunday, too—'

'Ah! Mary, do you want gaiety? No; if we cannot have it in a holy place, let it at least have the consecration of the day—let us have fifty-two wedding-days a year instead of one. Indeed, I would not press you, but that I could take care of you so much better; and it is not as if our acquaintance had not begun—how long ago—twenty-seven years, I think?'

'Settle it as you like,' she managed to say, with a great flood of tears—but what soft bright tears! 'I trust you.'

He saw she wanted solitude; he only stayed for a few words of earnest thanks, and the assurance that secrecy and quietness would be best assured by speed. 'I will come back,' he said, 'when I have seen to the arrangement. And there is one thing I must do first—one poor fellow who must not be left in suspense any longer.'

Tired as he ought to have been, he lightly crossed the *sala* to the room appropriated to business, where he had desired the two clerks to wait for him, and where Tom Madison stood against the wall, with folded arms, while Ford lounged in a disengaged attitude on a chair, but rose alert and respectful at his appearance.

Louis asked one or two necessary questions on the custody of the office for the night and ensuing day, and Ford made repeated assurances that nothing would be found missing that had been left in his charge. 'I believe you, Mr. Delaford,' said Fitzjocelyn, quietly. 'I do not think the lower species of fraud was ever in your style.'

Delaford tried to open his lips, but visibly shook. Louis answered, what he had not yet said, 'I do not intend to expose you. I think you had what excuse neglect can give, and unless I should be called on conscientiously to speak to your character, I shall leave you to make a new one.'

Delaford began to stammer out thanks, and promises of explaining the whole of Robson's speculations (little he knew the whole of them).

'There is one earnest of your return to sincerity that I require,' said Louis. 'Explain at once the degree of your acquaintance with Charlotte Arnold.'

Tom Madison still stood moody—affecting not to hear.

'Oh! my lord, I did not know that you were interested in that young person.'

'I am interested where innocence has been maligned,' said Louis, sternly.

'I am sure, my lord, nothing has ever passed at which the most particular need take umbrage,' exclaimed Delaford. 'If Mr. Madison will recollect, I mentioned nothing as the most fastidious need—'

Mr. Madison would not hear.

'You only inferred that she had not been insensible to your attractions?'

'Why, indeed, my lord, I flatter myself that in my time I have had the happiness of not being displeasing to the sex,' said Delaford, with a sigh and a simper.

'It is a mortifying question, but you owe it to the young woman to answer, whether she gave you any encouragement.'

'No, my lord. I must confess that she always spoke of a previous attachment, and dashed my earlier hopes to the ground.'

'And the book of poems! How came that to be in your possession?'

Delaforde confessed that it had been a little tribute, returned upon his hands by the young lady in question.

'One question more, Mr. Delaforde: what was the fact as to her lending you means for your voyage?'

Delaforde was not easily brought to confession on this head; but he did at length own that he had gone in great distress to Charlotte, and had appealed to her bounty, and distinctly acknowledged that it was not in the capacity of suitor; in fact, as he ended by declaring, he had the pleasure of saying that there was no young person whom he esteemed more highly than Miss Arnold, and that she had never given him the least encouragement, such as need distress the happy man who had secured her affections.

The happy man did not move till Delaforde had left the room, when Louis walked up to him and said, 'I can further tell you, of my own knowledge, that that good girl refused large wages, and a lady's-maid's place, partly because she would not live in the same house with that man; and she has worked on with a faithful affection and constancy, beyond all praise, as the single servant of Mr. and Mrs. Frost in their distress.'

'Don't talk to me, my lord,' cried Tom, turning away; 'I'm the most unhappy man in the world!'

'I did not ask you to shake hands with Delaforde to-night. You will another day. He is only a vain coxcomb, and treated you to a little of his conceit, with, perhaps, a taste of spite at a successful rival; but he has only shown you what a possession you have in her.'

'You don't know what I've done, my lord. I have written her a letter that she can never forgive!'

'You don't know what I've done, Tom. I posted a letter by the mail just starting from Callao—a letter to Mr. Frost, with a hint to Charlotte that you were labouring under a little delusion; I knew, from your first narration, that Ford could be no other than my old friend, shorn of his beams.'

'That letter—' still muttered Tom.

'She'll forgive, and like you all the better for having afforded her a catastrophe, Tom. You may write by the next mail; unless, what is better still, you come home with us by the same, and speak for yourself. If I am your master then, I'll give you the holiday. Yes, Tom, it was important to me to clear up your countenance, for I want to bespeak your services to-morrow as my friend.'

'My lord!' cried Tom, aghast. 'If you do require any such service, though I should not have thought it, there are many nearer your own rank, officers and gentlemen, fitter for an affair of the kind. I never knew anything about fire-arms, since I gave up poaching.'

'Indeed, Tom, I am very far from intending to dispense with

your services. I want you to guide me to procure the required weapon !'

'Surely,' said Tom, with a deep, reluctant sigh, 'you never crossed the Isthmus without one?'

'Yes, indeed, I did ; I never saw the party there whom I should have liked to challenge in this way. Why, Tom, did you really think I had come out to Peru to fight a duel on a Sunday morning?'

'That's what comes of living in this sort of place. Duels are meat and drink to the people here,' said Tom, ashamed and relieved, 'and there have been those who told me it was all that was wanting to make me a gentleman. But in what capacity am I to serve you, my lord?'

'In the first place, tell me where I may procure a wedding-ring ! Yes, Tom, that's the weapon ! You've no objection to being my friend in that capacity?'

Tom's astonished delight went beyond the bounds of expression, and therefore was compressed into an almost grim 'Whatever you will, my lord ;' but two hot tears were gushing from his eyes. He dashed them away, and added, 'What a fool I am ! You'll believe me, my lord, though I can't speak, that, though there may be many nearer and more your equals, there's none on earth more glad and happy to see you so than myself.'

'I believe it, indeed, Tom ; shake hands, to wish me joy ; I am right glad to have one here from Ormersfield, to make it more home-like. For, though it is a hurry at last, you can guess what she has been to me from the first. Knowing her thoroughly has been one of the many, many benefits that Ferny dell conferred on me.'

There was no time for more than to enjoin silence. Louis had to hurry to the Consul and the chaplain, and to overcome their astonishment.

On the other hand, Mary was, as usual, seeking and recovering the balance of her startled spirits in her own chamber. She saw the matter wisely and simply, and had full confidence in Louis, with such a yearning for his protection that, it may be, the strange suddenness of the proposal cost her the less. She came forth and announced her intention to Mrs. Willis, who was inclined to resent it as derogatory to the dignity of womanhood, and the privileges of a bride ; but Mary smiled and answered that, 'when he had taken so much trouble for her, she could not give him any more by things of that sort. She must be as little in his way as possible.'

And Mrs. Willis sighed, and pitied her, but was glad that she should be off her poor brother's mind as soon as might be, and was glad to resign her task of chaperoning her.

Only three persons beyond the Consul's family knew what was about to happen, when Miss Ponsonby, in her deep mourning, attended the morning service in the large hall at the Consul-house ; and such eyes as were directed towards the handsome

stranger, only gazed at the unwonted spectacle of an English nobleman, not with the more eager curiosity that would have been attached to him had all been known.

Mr. Ward lingered a few moments, and begged for one word with Miss Ponsonby. She could not but comply, and came to meet him, blushing, but composed, in that simple, frank kindness which only wished to soften the disappointment.

'Mary,' he said, 'I am not come to harass you. I have done so long enough, and I would not have tormented you, but on that one head I did not do justice to your judgment. I see now how vain my hope was. I am glad to have met him—I am glad to know how worthy of you he is, and to have seen you in such hands.'

'You are very kind to speak so,' said Mary.

'Yes, Mary, I could not have borne to part with you, if I were not convinced that he is a good man as well as an able man. I might have known that you would not choose otherwise. I shall see your name among the great ladies of the land. I came to say something else. I wished to thank you for the many happy hours I have spent with you, though you never for a moment trifled with me. It was I who deceived myself. Good-bye, Mary. Perhaps you will write to my sister, and let her know of your arrival.'

'I will write to you, if you please,' said Mary.

'It will be a great pleasure,' he said, earnestly. 'And will you let me be of any use in my power to you and Lord Fitzjocelyn?'

'Indeed, we shall be most grateful. You have been a most kind and forbearing friend. I should like to know that you were happy,' said Mary, lingering, and hardly knowing what to say.

'My little nieces are fond enough of their uncle. My sister wants me. In short, you need not vex yourself about me. Some day, when I am an old man, I may come and bring you news of Lima. Meanwhile, you will sometimes wear this bracelet, and remember that you have an old friend. I shall call on Lord Fitzjocelyn at the office to-morrow, and see if we can find any clue to Robson's retreat. Good-bye, and blessings on you, Mary.'

Mary rejoined Louis, to speak to him of the kind and noble man who so generously and resolutely bore the wreck of his hopes. They walked up and down together in the cool shade of the trees in the Consul's garden, and they talked of the selfishness which seemed to take away the smart from the wound of disappointment. They spoke sometimes, but the day was for the most part spent in the sweetness of pensive, happy silence, musing with full hearts over this crowning of their long-deferred hopes, and not without prayer that the same protecting Hand might guide them, as they should walk together through life.

By and by Mary disappeared. She would perhaps have preferred her ordinary dress—but the bridal white seemed to her to be due both to Louis, and to the solemn rite and mystery; and when the time came, she met him, in her plain white muslin and long veil, confined by a few sprays of real orange flowers, beneath which her calmly noble face was seen, simple and collected as ever, forgetting in her earnestness all adjuncts that might have been embarrassing or distressing.

The large hall was darkening with twilight, and the flowers and branches that decked it showed gracefully in the subdued light. Prayer and praise had lately echoed there, and Louis and Mary could feel that He was with them who blessed the pair at Cana, far distant as they were from their own church—their own home. Yes, the Church, their mother, their home, was with them in her sacred ritual and her choice blessings, and their consciences were free from self-will, or self-pleasing, such as would have put far from them the precious gifts promised in the name of their Lord.

When it was over, and they first raised their eyes to one another's faces, each beheld in the other a look of entire thankful content, not the less perfect because it was grave and peaceful.

'I think mamma would be quite happy,' said Mary.

CHAPTER XLV

THE MARVEL OF PERU

Turn, Angelina, ever dear,
My charmer, turn to see
Thy own, thy long-lost Edwin here,
Restored to love and thee.—GOLDSMITH

LORD ORMERSFIELD sat alone in the library, where the fire burnt more for the sake of cheerfulness than of warmth. His eyes were weary with reading, and, taking off his spectacles, he turned his chair away from the table, and sat gazing into the fire, giving audience to dreamy thoughts.

He missed the sunny face ever prompt to watch his moods, and find or make time for the cheerful word or desultory chat which often broke and refreshed drier occupation. He remembered when he had hardly tolerated the glass of flowers, the scraps of drawing, the unbusiness-like books at his son's end of the table; but the room looked dull without them now, and he was ready to own the value of the grace and finish of life, hindering the daily task from absorbing the whole man, as had been the case with himself in middle life.

Somewhat of the calm of old age had begun to fall on the Earl, and he had latterly been wont to think more deeply. These trifles could not have spoken to his heart save for their connection with his son; and even Louis's tastes would have

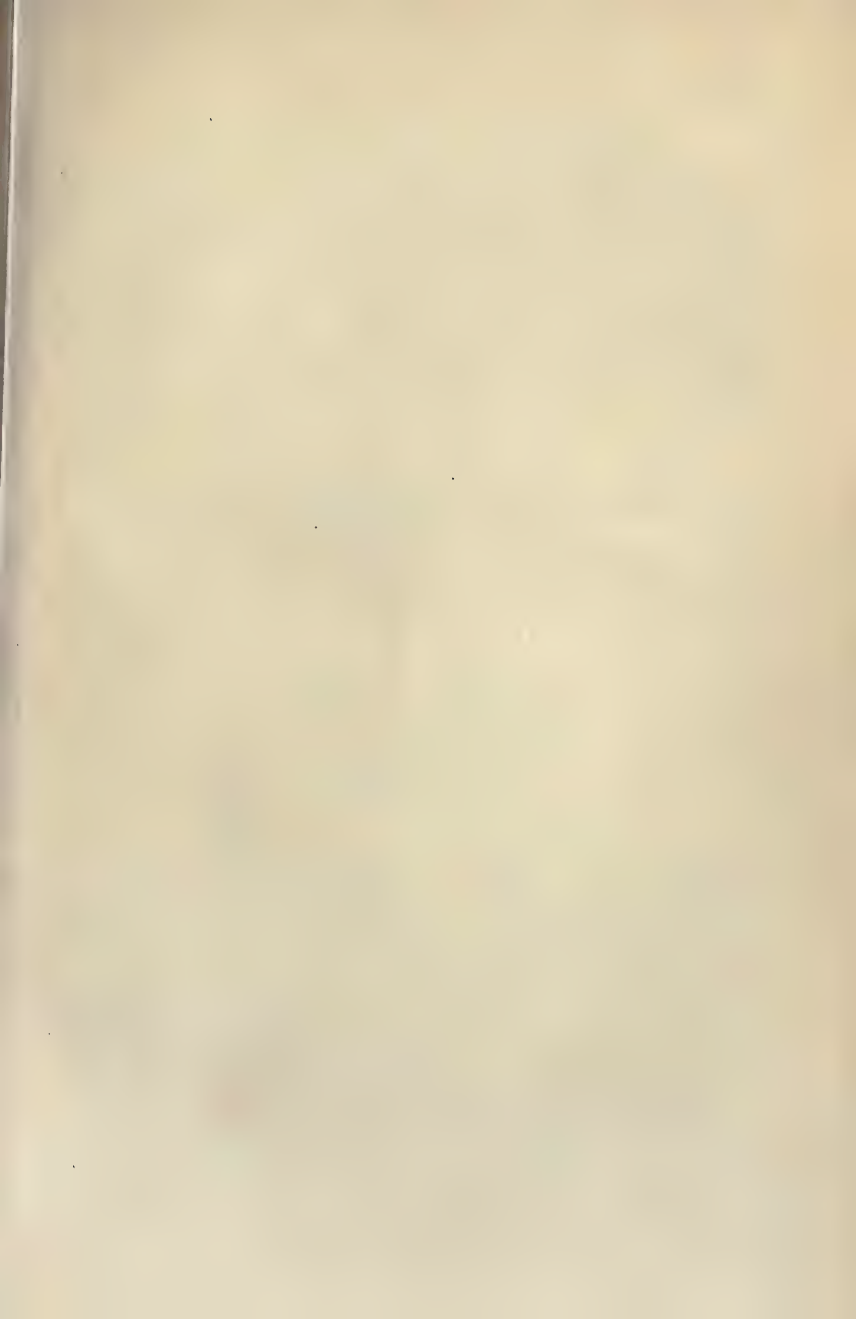
worn out with habit, had it not been for the radiance permanent in his own mind, namely, the thankful, adoring love that finds the true brightness in 'whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report.' This spirit it was which had kept his heart fresh, his spirit youthful, and changed constitutional versatility into a power of hearty adaptation to the least congenial tastes.

Gentleness, affection, humility, and refinement were in his nature. Mrs. Frost had trained these qualities into the beauty of Christian graces; and Mrs. Ponsonby and her daughter had taught him to bring his high principles to supply that which was wanting. Indolence of will, facility of disposition, unsteadiness of purpose, inconsiderate impulses without perseverance, had all betokened an inherent weakness, which the Earl's cure, ambition, had been powerless to remedy; but duty had been effectual in drawing strength out of what had been feeble by nature. It was religion that had made a man of Louis; and his father saw and owned it, no longer as merely the woman's guide in life, and the man's resource chiefly in death, to be respected and moderately attended to, but never so as to interfere unreasonably with the world. No; he had learnt that it was the only sure and sound moving-spring: he knew it as his son's strengthening, brightening thread of life; and began to perceive that his own course might have been less gloomy and less harsh, devoid of such dark strands, had he held the right clue. The contrast brought back some lines which, without marking, he had heard Louis and his aunt reading together; and, albeit little wont to look into his son's books, he was so much haunted by the rhythm that he rose and searched them out—

Yes, mark him well, ye cold and proud,
 Bewildered in a heartless crowd,
 Starting and turning pale
 At rumour's angry din:
 No storm can now assail
 The charm he bears within.
 Rejoicing still, and doing good,
 And with the thought of God imbued,
 No glare of high estate,
 No gloom of woe or want,
 The radiance may abate,
 Where Heaven delights to haunt.

The description went to his heart, so well did it agree with Louis. Yet there was a sad feeling, for the South American mail had been some days due, and he had not heard of his son since he was about to land at Callao. Five months was a long absence; and as the chances of failure, disappointment, climate, disease, and shipwreck arose before him, he marvelled at himself for having consented to peril his sole treasure, and even fancied that a solitary, childless old age might be the penalty in store for having waited to be led heavenward by his son.

It was seldom that the Earl gave way; and, reproaching himself for his weakness, he roused himself and rang the bell for





SWAIN

“Bring the other lamp.”—Page 471.

better light. There was a movement in the house, and for some moments the bell was not answered ; but presently the door was opened.

‘Bring the other lamp.’

‘Yes, my lord.’

The slow, soft voice did not belong to Frampton. He started up, and there stood Louis !

‘My dear father,’ he said ; and Lord Ormersfield grasped his son’s hand, and laid the other hand on his shoulder, but durst ask no questions, for the speedy return seemed to bespeak that he had failed. He looked in Louis’s face, and saw it full of emotion, with dew on the eyelashes ; but suddenly a sweet archness gleamed in the eyes, and he steadied his trembling lip to say with a smile,

‘Lady Fitzjocelyn !’

And that very moment Mary was in Lord Ormersfield’s arms.

‘My children ! my dear children, happy at last ! God bless you ! This is all I ever wished !’

He held a hand of each, and looked from one to the other till Mary turned away to hide her tears of joy ; and Louis, with his eyes still moist, began talking, to give her time to recover.

‘You will forgive our not writing ? We landed this morning, found the last mail was not come in, and could not help coming on. We knew you would be anxious, and thought you would not mind the suddenness.’

‘No, indeed,’ said his father ; ‘if all surprises were like this one ! But you are the loser, Mary. I am afraid this is not the reception for a bride !’

‘Mary has dispensed with much that belongs to a bride,’ said Louis. ‘See here !’ and, seizing her hand, he began pulling off her glove, till she did it for him ; ‘did you ever see such a wedding-ring ?—a great, solid thing of Peruvian gold, with a Spanish posy inside !’

‘I like it,’ said Mary ; ‘it shows—’

‘What you are worth, eh, Mary ? Well ! here we are ! It seems real at last ! And you, father, have you been well ?’

‘Yes, well indeed, now I have you both ! But how came you so quickly ? You never brought her across the Isthmus ?’

‘Indeed I did. She would come. It was her first act of rebellion ; for we were not going to let you meet the frosts alone—the October frosts, I mean ; I hope the Dynevor Frosts are all right ?’

Frampton was here seen at the open door, doubtful whether to intrude ; yet, impelled by necessity, as he caught Fitzjocelyn’s eye, he, hesitating, said—

‘My lord, the Spanish gentleman !’

‘The greatest triumph of my life !’ cried Louis, actually clapping his hands together with ecstasy, to the butler’s extreme astonishment.

‘Why, Frampton, don’t you know him ?’

'My lord!!!'

'Let me introduce you, then, to—Mr. Thomas Madison!' and, as Frampton still stood perplexed, looking at the fine, foreign-looking man, who was keeping in the background, busied with the luggage, Louis continued, 'You cannot credit such a marvel of Peru!'

'Young Madison, my lord!' repeated Frampton, slowly coming to his senses.

'No other. He has done Lady Fitzjocelyn and all of us infinite service,' continued Louis, quickly, to prevent Madison's reception from receiving a fall in proportion to the grandeur of the first impression. 'He is to stay here for a short time before going to his appointment at Bristol, in Mr. Ward's counting-house, with a salary of £180. I shall be much obliged if you will make him welcome.'

And, returning in his glee to the library, Louis found Mary explaining how 'a gentleman at Lima,' who had long professed to covet so good a clerk as Madison, had, on the break-up of their firm, offered a confidential post, for which he was well fitted by his knowledge of the Spanish language and the South American trade, to receive the cargoes sent home. 'In truth,' said Louis, coming in, 'I had reason to be proud of my pupil. We could never have found our way through the accounts without him; and the old Cornish man, whom we sent for from the mines, gave testimony to him such as will do Mr. Holdsworth's heart good. But nothing is equal to Frampton's taking him for a Spanish Don!'

'And poor Delaford's witness was quite as much to his credit,' said Mary.

'Ay! if Delaford had not been equally willing to depose against him when he was the apparent Catiline!' said Louis. 'Poor Delaford! he was very useful to us, after all; and I should be glad to know he had a better fate than going off to the diggings with a year's salary in his pocket!'¹

'Then everything is settled?' asked his father.

'Almost everything. The mines are off our hands, and the transfer will be completed as soon as Oliver has sent his signature; and there's quite enough saved to make them very comfortable. You have told me nothing of them yet.'

'They are all very well. James has been coming here twice a week since I have been at home, and has been very attentive and pleasant; but I have not been at the Terrace much. There never was such a houseful of children. Oliver's room is the only place where one is safe from falling over two or three. However, they seem to like it, and to think, the more the better. James came over here the morning after the boy was born, as much delighted as if he had had any prospects.'

¹ A recent writer relates that he found the near relation of a nobleman gaining a scanty livelihood as shoe-black at the diggings. Query. Might not this be Mr. Delaford?

'A boy at last!—Poor Mr. Dynevore! Does he take it as an insult to his misfortunes?'

'He seems as well pleased as they; and, in fact, I hope the boy may not, after all, be unprovided for. Mr. Mansell wrote to offer to be godfather, and I thought I could not do otherwise than ask him to stay here. I am glad I did so, for he told me that now he has seen for himself the noble way they are going on in, he has made up his mind. He has no relation nearer than Isabel, and he means to make his will in favour of her son. He asked whether I would be a trustee; but I said I was growing old, and had little doubt you would be glad enough. You will have plenty of such work, Louis. It is very dangerous to be known as a good man-of-business, and good-natured.'

'Pray, how does Jem bear it?'

'With tolerable equanimity. It may be many years before the child is affected by it, if Mrs. Mansell has it for her life. Besides, James is a wiser man than he used to be.'

'He has been somewhat like Robinson Crusoe's old goat,' said Louis. 'Poor Jem! the fall and the scanty fare tamed him. I liked him so well before, that I did not know how much better I was yet to like him. Mary, you must see his workhouse. Giving up his time to it as he does, he does infinite good there.'

'Yes, Mr. Calcott says that he lives in fear of some one offering him a living,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'And the dear old Giraffe?' said Louis.

'Clara? She is looking almost handsome. I wish some good man would marry her. She would make an excellent wife.'

'I am not ready to spare her yet,' said Mary; 'I must make acquaintance with her before any excellent man carries her off.'

'But there is a marriage that will surprise you,' said the Earl; 'your eldest cousin, whose name I can never remember—'

'Virginia,' cried Louis. 'Captain Lonsdale, I hope?'

'What could have made you fix on him?'

'Because the barricades could not have been in vain, and he was an excellent fellow, to whom I owe a great deal of gratitude. He kept my aunt's terrors in abeyance most gallantly; and little Virginia drank in his words, and built up a hero! But how was it?'

'You remember that Lady Conway would not take our advice, and stay quietly at home. On the first steamer she fell in with this captain, and it seems that she was helpless enough, without her former butler, to be very grateful to him for managing her passports and conducting her through Germany. And the conclusion was, that she herself had encouraged him so far, that she really had not any justification in refusing when he proposed for the young lady, as he is fairly provided for.'

'My poor aunt! No one ever pities her when she is "hoist with her own petard!" I am glad poor Virginia is to be happy in her own way.'

'I shall send my congratulations to-morrow,' said the Earl,

smiling triumphantly, 'and a piece of intelligence of my own. At H. B. M. Consul's, Lima—what day was it, Louis?'

Mary ran away to take off her bonnet, as much surprised by the Earl's mirth as if she had seen primroses in December. Yet such blossoms are sometimes tempted forth; and affection was breathing something like a second spring on the life so long unnaturally chilled and blighted. If his shoulders were bowed, his figure had lost much of its rigidity; and though his locks were thinned and whitened, and his countenance slightly aged, yet the softened look and the more frequent smile had smoothed away the sternness, and given gentleness to his dignity.

No sooner was she out of the room than Lord Ormersfield asked, 'And what have you done with the Spanish woman?'

The answer excited a peal of laughter, which made Louis stand aghast, both at such unprecedented merriment and at the cause; for hitherto he had so entirely felt with Mary, as never to have seen the ludicrous aspect of the elopement. Presently, however, he was amused by perceiving that his father not merely regarded it as a relief from an embarrassing charge, but as an entire acquittal for his own conscience for any slanders he had formerly believed of Doña Rosa.

Louis briefly explained that, the poor lady being provided for by Robson's investments in America, he had thought it right that the Ponsonby share of the firm should bear the loss through these embezzlements; and he had found that her extravagance had made such inroads on the property, that while the Dynevour share (always the largest) resulted in a fair competence, Louis had saved nothing out of the wreck of the Ponsonby affairs but Mary herself. 'Can you excuse it, father?' he said, with all the old *debonnaire* manner.

'You will never be a rich man, Louis. You and she will have some cares, but'—and his voice grew thick—'you are rich in what makes life happy. You have left me nothing more to ask or wish for!'

'Except that I may be worthy of her, father. You first taught me how she ought to be loved. You have been very patient with me all this time. I feel as if I *must* thank you for her—' and then, changing his tone as she opened the door—'Look at her now she has her bonnet off—does not she look natural?'

'I am sure I feel so,' said Mary. 'You know this always seemed more like home than anything else.'

'Yes, and now I do feel sure that I have you at last, Mary. That Moorish castle of yours used to make me afraid of wakening: it was so much fitter for Isabel's fantastic Viscount. By the bye, has she brought that book out?'

'Oh, yes; and James is nearly as proud of it as he is of his son. He actually wanted me to read it! He tells me it is selling very well, and I hope it may really bring them in something.'

'Now, then—there's the tea. Sit down, Mary, and look exactly as you did the morning I came home and found you.'

'I'm afraid I cannot,' said Mary, looking up in his face with an arch, deprecating expression.

'Why not?'

'Don't you know that I am so much happier?'

Before breakfast next morning Fitzjocelyn must visit his farm, and Mary must come with him.

How delicious was that English morning after their voyage; the slant rays of the sun silvering the turf, and casting rainbows across the gossamer threads from one brown bent to another; the harvest fields on the slopes dotted with rich sheaves of wheat; the coppices, in their summer glory, here and there touched with the gold of early autumn, and the slopes and meadows bright with lively green, a pleasant change for eyes fresh from the bare, rugged mountain-side and the rank unwholesome vegetation of Panama. Shaggy little Scottish oxen were feeding on the dewy grass, their black coats looking sleek in the sun beyond the long shadows of the thorns; but as Mary said, laughing, 'Only Farmer Fitzjocelyn's cattle came here now;' and she stopped more than once to be introduced to some notable animal, or to hear the history of experiments in fattening beasts.

'There! they have found you out! That's for you,' said Louis, as a merry peal of bells broke out from the church tower, and came joyously up through the tranquil air. 'Yes, Ormersfield, you are greeting a friend! You may be very glad, old place! I wish Mr. Holdsworth would come up to breakfast! Is it too wet for you this way, Mary?'

This way was into Ferny dell, and Mary answered, 'Oh, no—no; it is where I most wanted to go with you. We have never been there together since—'

'No, you never would walk with me after I could go alone!' said Louis, with a playful tone of reproach, veiling deep feeling.

In silence he handed her down the rocky steps, plunging deeper among the hazels and rowan-trees; then pausing, he turned aside the luxuriant leaves of a tuft of hart's-tongue, and showed her, cut on a stone, veiled both by the verdure and the form of the rock, the letters—

Deo Gratias,
L. F. 1847.

'I like that!' was all that Mary's full heart allowed her to say.

'Yes,' said Louis, 'I feel quite as thankful for the accident as for the preservation.'

'And that dear mamma was with us,' added Mary. 'Between her and you, it was a blessing to us all. I see these letters are not new; you must have cut them out long ago.'

'As soon as I could get here without help,' he answered. 'I thought I should be able to find the very spot where I lay, by remembering the cross which the bare mountain-ash boughs

made against the sky ; but by that time they were all leaf and flower ; and now, do you see, there they are, with the fruit just formed and blushing.

‘Like other things,’ said Mary, reaching after the spray ; ‘once all blossom, now—’

‘Fruit very unripe,’ as he said, between a smile and a sigh ; ‘but there is some encouragement in the world after all, and every project of mine has not turned out like my two specimens of copper ore. You remember them, Mary, and our first encounter.’

‘Remember it !’ said Mary. ‘I don’t think I forget a day of that summer.’

‘What I brought you here for,’ said Louis, ‘was to ask you to let me do what I have long wished—to let me put the letter M here.’

‘I think you might have done it without leave,’ said Mary.

‘So I might at first, but by the time I came here again, Mary, you had become in my estimation “a little more than kin,” and less than—no, I won’t say that, but one could not treat you as comfortably as Clara. I lost a cousin one August day, and never found her again !’

‘Never ?’

‘Never—but the odd thing is, that I cannot believe that what I did find has been away these seven years.’

‘Yes, that is very strange,’ said Mary ; ‘I have felt it so. We do seem to understand and guess each other’s thoughts as if we had been going on together all this time. I believe it is because you gave me the first impulse to think, and taught me the way.’

‘And I know who first taught me to think to any purpose,’ said Louis, smiling. ‘But who is this descending on us ?’

It was the Spanish gentleman, reddening all over at such an encounter, in mid-career towards ‘her at the Terrace,’ and muttering something, breathless and almost surly, about begging pardon.

‘Look here, Tom,’ said Louis, lifting the leaves to show the letters. ‘That is all I ever could feel on that matter, and so should you. There, no more about it,—you want to be on your way ; and tell Mr. Frost that we shall be at Northwold in the afternoon.’

About half an hour after, Clara was delicately blowing the dust out of the wreath of forget-me-nots on the porcelain shepherdess’s hat, when a shriek resounded through the house, and, barely saving the Arcadian in her start, she rushed downstairs. James, in his shirt-sleeves, was already on his way to the kitchen. There Kitty was found, too much frightened to run away, making lunges with the toasting-fork at a black-bearded figure, who held in his arms Charlotte Arnold, in a fit of the almost forgotten hysterics. The workhouse girl shrieked for the police ; Jane was at Master Oliver’s door, prepared for flight or defence ; Isabel stood on the stairs, with her baby in

her arms, and her little flock clinging to her skirts, when Clara darted back, laughing too much to speak distinctly, as she tried to explain who the ruffian really was. 'And Louis is coming, and Mary! Oh! Isabel, he has her at last! Oh! Jem! Jem! did we ever want dear granny so much! I always knew it would come right at last! Jane, Jane, do you hear, Lord Fitzjocelyn is married! Let me in; I must go and tell Uncle Oliver!'

James looked at Isabel, and read in her smile Clara's final acquittal from all suspicions beneath the dignity of both. Uncle Oliver would have damped her joy, had it been in his power. He gave up his affairs as hopeless, as soon as he found that young Fitzjocelyn had only made them an excuse for getting married, and he was so excessively angry with her for being happy, that she found she must carry her joyous face out of his sight.

It was not easy to be a dignified steady governess that morning, and when the lessons were finished, she could have danced home all the way. She had scarcely reached the Terrace gate, when the well-known sound of the wheels was heard, and in another moment she was between the two dear cousins; Fitzjocelyn's eyes dancing with gladness, and Mary's broad tranquil brow and frank kindly smile free from the shadow of a single cloud! Clara's heart leapt up with joy, joy full and unmixed, the guerdon of the spirit untouched by vanity or selfishness, without one taint that could have mortified into jealous, disappointed pain. It was bliss to one of those whom she loved best; it was the winning of a brother and sister, and perhaps Clara's life had never had a happier moment.

Lord Ormersfield could have thanked her for that joyous, innocent welcome. He had paid her attentions for his son's sake, of which he had become rather ashamed; and as Louis and Mary hastened on to meet James and Isabel, he detained her for a moment, to say some special words of kindness. Clara, perhaps, had an intuitive perception of his meaning, and reference to her past heiress estate, for she laughed gaily, and said, 'Yes, I never was more glad of anything! He was so patient that I was sure he deserved it! I always trusted to such a time as this, when he used to talk to me for want of dear grandmamma.'

Mary was led up-stairs to be introduced to the five children, while the gentlemen went over the accounts in Oliver's room. Enough had been rescued from the ruin to secure, not wealth, but fair competence; the mines were disposed of to a company which would pay the value by instalments, and all the remainder of the business was in train to be easily wound up by Mr. Ward. Mr. Dynevor's gratitude was not overpowering: he was short and dry, privately convinced that he could have managed matters much better himself, and charging all the loss on Fitzjocelyn's folly in letting Robson escape. But, though James was hurt at his unthankfulness, and Lord Ormersfield

could have been very angry, the party most concerned did not take it much to heart; he believed he had done his best, but an experienced eye might detect blunders, and he knew it was hard to trust affairs out of one's own hands.

Even the Earl was glad to escape to the sitting-room, though every one was talking at once, and Mercy the loudest; and Louis, as the children would call him in spite of their mamma, was at once seized on by Kitty to be introduced to 'our brother.'

'And what is his name, Kitty?'

'Woland!' shouted all the young ladies in chorus.

'Sir Woland is in the book that mamma did make,' said Kitty.

Louis looked at Isabel with laughing eyes.

'It was Uncle Oliver's great wish,' she said, 'and we did not wish to remember the days of Sir Hubert.'

Before Lord Ormersfield was quite deafened, Louis recollected that they must show Mary at the House Beautiful; and they took leave. The Earl begged James to come back to dinner with them, and Louis asked if Clara could not find room in the carriage too. It was the earnest of what Ormersfield was to be to her henceforth, and she was all delight, and earnestness to be allowed to walk home with James by starlight. And the evening realized all she could wish. The gentlemen had their conversation in the dining-room, and Mary and Clara sat on the steps together in the warm twilight, and talked of granny; and Clara poured out all that Mary did not yet know of Louis.

'I hear you have been in hysterics again,' had been Lord Fitzjocelyn's greeting to Charlotte. 'You are prepared for the consequences.'

Charlotte was prepared. The mutual pardon had not been *very* hard to gain, and Tom had only to combat her declarations that it was downright presumptuous for her to have more than master had a year, and her protests that she could not leave her mistress and the dear children in their poverty. The tidings that they were relieved from their present straits answered this scruple, and Charlotte was a pretty picture of shrinking exultation when she conducted her betrothed to Mrs. Martha, who, however, declared that she would not take his hundred and eighty pounds a year—no, nor twice that,—to marry him in that there black beard.

Mrs. Beckett made him exceedingly welcome, and he spent the chief part of his time at No. 5, where he was much more at ease than at Ormersfield. He confessed that, though not given to bashfulness before any man, there was something in Mr. Frampton's excessive civility that quite overcame him, and made him always expect to be kicked out of doors the next minute for sauciness.

Charlotte's whirlwinds of feeling had nearly expended themselves in that one shock of meeting. The years of cheerful toil, and the weeks of grief and suspense, had been good training for that silly little heart, and the prospect of her new duties brought

on her a sobering sense of responsibility. She would always be tender and clinging, but the fragrant woodbine would be trained round a sound, sturdy oak, and her modesty, gentleness, and sincerity gave every promise of her being an excellent wife.

Tom had little time to spare before undertaking his new office, and it was better that the parting should be speedy, for it was a grievous one, both to the little bride and to Isabel and the children. Friend rather than servant, her place could be ill supplied by the two maids who were coming in her room, and Isabel could have found it in her heart to sympathize with Mercy and Salome in their detestation of the black man who was coming to take away their dear Charlotte.

Clara's first outlay, on her restoration to comparative wealth, was on Charlotte's wedding-dress. It was a commission given to Mary, when, with Fitzjocelyn, she went to London for one day, to put the final stroke to the dissolution of the unfortunate firm, and to rejoice Aunt Melicent with the sight of her happiness.

Good old Miss Ponsonby's heart was some degrees softer and less narrow than formerly. She had a good many prejudices left, but she did not venture on such sweeping censures as in old times, and she would have welcomed Lord Ormersfield with real cordiality, for the sake of his love to her Mary. Indeed, Louis's fascinations and Mary's bright face had almost persuaded her into coming home with them; but the confirmed Londoner prevailed, and she had a tyrant maid-servant, who would not let her go, even to the festival at Ormersfield in honour of her niece.

The Earl was bent on rejoicings for his son's marriage, and Louis dexterously managed that the banquet should take place on the day fixed for Tom's wedding, thus casting off all oppressive sense of display, by regarding it as Madison's feast instead of his own. Clara, who seemed to have been set free from governing tasks solely to be the willing slave of all the world, worked as hard as Mary and Louis at all the joyous arrangements; nor was the festival itself, like many such events, less bright than the previous toils.

The wedding took place in Ormersfield Church, on a bright September morning; James Frost performed the marriage, Lord Fitzjocelyn gave the bride away, and little Kitty was the bridesmaid. The ring was of Peruvian gold, and the brooch that clasped the bride's lace collar was of silver from the San Benito mine. In her white bonnet and dove-coloured silk, she looked as simple and ladylike as she was pretty, and a very graceful contrast to her Spanish gentleman bridegroom.

The Ormersfield bowling-green, which was wont to be so still and deserted, hemmed in by the dark ilex belt, beheld such a scene as had not taken place there since its present master was a boy. There were long tables spread for guests of all ranks and degrees. Louis had his own way with the invitations, and had gathered a miscellaneous host. Sir Miles Oakstead had come

to see his old friend made happy, and to smile as he was introduced to the rose-coloured pastor in his glass case. Mr. Calcott was there, and Mrs. Calcott, all feuds with Mrs. James Frost long since forgotten; and Sir Gilbert Brewster shone in his colonel's uniform,—for Lady Fitzjocelyn had intimated a special desire that all the members of the Yeomanry should appear in costume; and many a young farmer's wife and sister came all the more proudly, in the fond belief that her own peculiar hero looked in his blue and silver 'as well as Lord Fitzjocelyn himself.' And Miss Mercy Faithfull was there, watching over Oliver, to make up for the want of her sister. And old Mr. Walby was bowing and gossiping with many a patient; and James, with his little brown woman in his hand, was looking after the party of paupers for whom he had obtained a holiday; and Mr. Holdsworth was keeping guard over his village boys, whose respectable parents remained in two separate throngs, male and female; and Clara Frost was here, there, and everywhere—now setting Mrs. Richardson at ease, now carrying little Mercy to look at the band, now conveying away Salome when frightened, now finding a mother for a village child taken with a sobbing fit of shyness, now conducting a stray schoolboy to his companions, now running up for a few gay words to her old uncle, to make sure that he was neither chilly nor tired. How pleasant it was to her to mingle with group after group of people, and hear from one and another how handsome and how happy Lord Fitzjocelyn looked, and Lady Fitzjocelyn quite beautiful; and then, as they walked from party to party, setting all at ease and leaving pleased looks wherever they went, to cross them now and then, and exchange a blithe smile or merry remark.

No melancholy gaps here! thought she, as she helped her uncle to the easy-chair prepared for him at the dinner-table; no spiritless curiosity, no forced attempts to display what no one felt!

There must needs be toasts, and such as thought themselves assembled for the sake of the 'marriage in high life,' were taken by surprise when Lord Fitzjocelyn rose, and began by thanking those assembled for assisting in doing honour to the event of the day—the marriage of two persons, for each of whom he himself as well as those most dear to him felt the warmest respect and gratitude for essential services and disinterested attachment, alike in adversity and in prosperity. Unpleasant as he knew it was to have such truths spoken to one's face, he could not deny himself the satisfaction of expressing a portion of the esteem and reverence he felt for such noble conduct as had been displayed by those whose health he had the pleasure to propose—Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Madison.

'There,' was his aside, as he sat down, 'I only hope I have not made him surly; poor fellow, I have put him in a predicament, but it could not be otherwise!'

Clara had tears in her eyes, but not like those she had shed at Cheveleigh; James gave Louis a look of heart-felt gratitude, bowed the lowest to the happy pair, and held up little Kitty that her imitative nod and sip might not be lost upon them.

Mrs. Beckett said, 'Well, I never! If ever a girl deserved it,' choked, and flourished her white handkerchief; Frampton saluted like my lord and Louis XIV. rolled into one; and Warren and Gervas privately agreed that they did not know what was coming of the world, since Marksedge poachers had only to go to foreign parts to be coined goold in the silver mines. Mrs. Madison's pretty face was all blushes, smiles, and tears. Mr. Madison rose to reply with unexpected alacrity, and Louis was soon relieved from anxiety, at least, as far as regarded his eloquence, for he thought in the majestic Spanish idiom, and translated as he went.

'My lords,' he began, 'gentlemen and ladies and neighbours, my Lord Fitzjocelyn has done my wife and myself an honour as unlooked-for as undeserved; and the manner of the favour is such that we shall carry the grateful remembrance to the end of our lives. He has been so condescending as to speak of such services as it was in our power to render; but he has passed over in silence that which gives him a claim to the utmost that I could place at his feet. He will forgive me for speaking openly; for I cannot refrain from disburthening my mind, and letting you know, even more than you are at present aware of, what your Señor—what your lord truly is. Most of you have known me but too well. It is not ten years since I was a rude, untaught boy upon the heath, such as a large proportion of those present would deem beneath their notice: Lord Fitzjocelyn did not think so. His kindness of manner and encouraging words awakened in me new life and energy. He gave me his time and his teaching, and, what was far more, he gave me his sympathy and his example. It was these which gave vitality to lessons dimly understood, or which had fallen dead on my ears, when only heard in my irregular attendance at school. But the work in me was tardy, and at first I requited his kindness with presumption, insubordination, and carelessness. Then, when I had been dismissed, and when my wilful neglect had occasioned the accident of which the traces are still only too visible, then, did I not merit to be exposed and cast off for ever? I knew it, and I fled, as if I could leave behind me my grief and my shame. Little did I dare to guess that he was dealing with me as though I had been his own brother, and scrupulously concealing my share in the misfortune. When I returned, sullen and overwhelmed, he alone,—yes! and while still suffering severely—spoke a kind word to me, and exerted himself to rescue me from the utter ruin and degradation to which despair would have led me. He placed me in the situation which conducted me to my present position; he gave me the impulse to improve myself; and, above all, he infused into

me the principles without which the rest would have been mere temptations. If I have been blest beyond my deserts—if I have been prosperous beyond reasonable expectation—if, among numerous failures, I have withstood some evils—all, under the greatest and highest Benefactor, is owing to the kindness, and, above all, to the generous forbearance, of Lord Fitzjocelyn. I wish I could testify my gratitude in any better manner than by speaking of him to his face; but I am sure you will all drink his health more heartily, if possible, for knowing one more trait in addition to your own personal experience of his character!’

Alas! that all things hidden, and yet to be proclaimed on the house-tops, would bear the light as well as Fitzjocelyn’s secret! The revelation of this unobtrusive act of patience and forbearance excited a perfect tumult of enthusiasm among persons already worked up to great ardour for one so beloved; and shouts, and even tears, on every side strove in vain to express the response to Madison’s words.

‘Too bad, Tom!’ was Louis’s muttered comment.

‘You are paid in your own coin,’ retorted Mary, raising her glistening eyes, full of archness.

‘I perceive it is no surprise to you, Lady Fitzjocelyn!’ said Sir Miles Oakstead; ‘and, I own, nothing from that quarter’ (nodding at Louis) ‘surprises me greatly.’

‘She practised eavesdropping,’ said Louis, ‘when the poor fellow was relieving his mind by a confession to the present Mrs. Madison.’

‘And I think Mrs. Madison and I deserve credit for having kept the secret so long,’ said Mary.

‘It explains,’ observed Mr. Holdsworth. ‘I did not understand your power over Madison.’

‘It was the making of us both,’ said Louis; ‘and a very fine specimen of the grandeur of that rough diamond. It elucidates what I have always said, that if you can but find the one vulnerable place, there is a wonderful fund of nobleness in some of these people.’

‘Do you take this gentleman as an average specimen?’

‘Every ploughboy is not an undeveloped Madison; but in every parish there may be some one with either the *thinking* or the rising element in his composition; and if the right ingredient be not added, the fermentation will turn sour, as my neglect had very nearly made it do with him. He would have been a fine demagogue by this time, if he had not had a generous temper and Sunday-school foundation.’

‘Hush!’ said Mary, smiling—‘you must not moralize. I believe you are doing it that poor Farmer Norris may not catch your eye.’

Louis gave a *debonnaire* glance of resignation; and the farmer, rising in the full current of feeling caused by Madison’s speech, said, with thorough downright emotion, that he knew it was of no

use to try to enchain what had been already so well expressed ; but he believed there was scarcely a person present who did not feel, equally with Mr. Madison, the right to claim Lord Fitzjocelyn as a personal friend,—and an irrepressible hum of fervent assent proved how truly the farmer spoke. ‘Yes,—each had in turn experienced so much of his friendly kindness, and, what was more, of his sympathy, that he could confidently affirm that there was scarcely one in the neighbourhood who had not learnt the news of his happiness as if some good thing had happened to himself individually. They all as one man were delighted to have him at home again, and to wish him joy of the lady, whom many of them knew already well enough to rejoice in welcoming him for her own sake, as well as for that of Lord Fitzjocelyn.’

Again and again did the cheers break forth—hearty, homely, and sincere ; and such were the bright, tearful, loving eyes, which sought those of Fitzjocelyn on every side, that his own filled so fast that all seemed dazzled and misty, and he hastily strove to clear them as he arose ; but the swelling of his heart brought the happy dew again, and would scarcely let him find voice. ‘My friends, my good friends, you are all very kind to me. It is of no use to tell you how little I deserve it, but you know how much I wish to do so, and here is one who has helped me, and who will help me. We thank you with all our hearts. You may well wish my father and me joy, and yourselves too. Thank you ; you should not look at me so kindly if you wish me to say more.’

The Earl, who had studied popularity as a useful engine, but had never prized love beyond his own family, was exceedingly touched by the ardour of enthusiastic affection that his son had obtained,—not by courting suffrages, not by gifts, not by promises, but simply by real open-hearted love to every one. Lord Ormersfield himself came in for a demonstration of warm feeling which he would certainly never have sought nor obtained ten years ago, when he was respected and looked up to as an upright representative of certain opinions ; but personally, either disliked or regarded with coldness.

He knew what these cheers were worth, and that even Fitzjocelyn might not long be the popular hero ; but he was not the less gratified and triumphant, and felt that no success of his whole life had been worth the present.

‘After all, Clara,’ said Oliver Dynevor, as his nephew and niece were assisting him to the carriage, ‘they have managed these things better than we did, though they did not have Gunter.’

‘Gunter can’t bring heart’s love down from town in a box,’ said Clara, in a flash of indignation. ‘No, dear uncle, there are things that can’t be got unless by living for them.’

‘Nor even by living for them, Clara,’ said James ; ‘you must live for something else.’

Lord Ormersfield had heard these few last words, and there was deep thought in his eye as he bade his cousin farewell at the hall door.

Clara was the last to take her place ; and, as she turned round with a merry smile to wish him good-bye, he said, ' You have been making yourself very useful, Clara ; I am afraid you have had no time to enjoy yourself.'

' That's a contradiction,' said Clara, laughing ; ' here's busy little Kitty, who never is thoroughly happy but when she thinks she is useful, and I am child enough to be of the same mind. I never was unhappy but when I was set to enjoy myself. It has been the most beautiful day of my life. Thank you for it. Good-bye !'

The Earl crossed the hall, and found Mary standing alone on the Terrace steps, looked out at the curling smoke from the cottage chimneys, and on the coppices and hedge-rows.

' Are you tired my dear ?' he said.

' Oh, no ! I was only thinking of dear mamma's persuading Louis to go on with the crumpled plans of those cottages. How happy she would be.'

' I was thinking of her likewise,' said the Earl. ' She spoke truly when she told me that he might not be what I then wished to make him, but something far better.'

Mary looked up with a satisfied smile of approval, saying, ' I am so glad you think so.'

' Yes,' said Lord Ormersfield, ' I have thought a good deal since. I have been alone here, and I think I see why Louis has done better than some of his elders. It seems to me that some of us have not known the duties that lay by the wayside, so to speak, from the main purpose of life. I wish I could talk it over with your mother, my dear ; what do you think she would say ?'

Mary thought of Louis's vision of the threads. ' I think,' she said, ' that I have heard her say something like it. The real aim of life is out of sight, and even good people are too apt to attach themselves to what is tangible, like friendship, or family affection, or usefulness, or public spirit ; but these are like the paths of glory which lead but to the grave, and no farther. It is the single-hearted, faithful aim towards the one thing needful, to which all other things may be added as mere accessories. It brings down strength and wisdom. It brings the life everlasting already to begin in this life, and so makes the path shine more and more unto the perfect day !'

THE END

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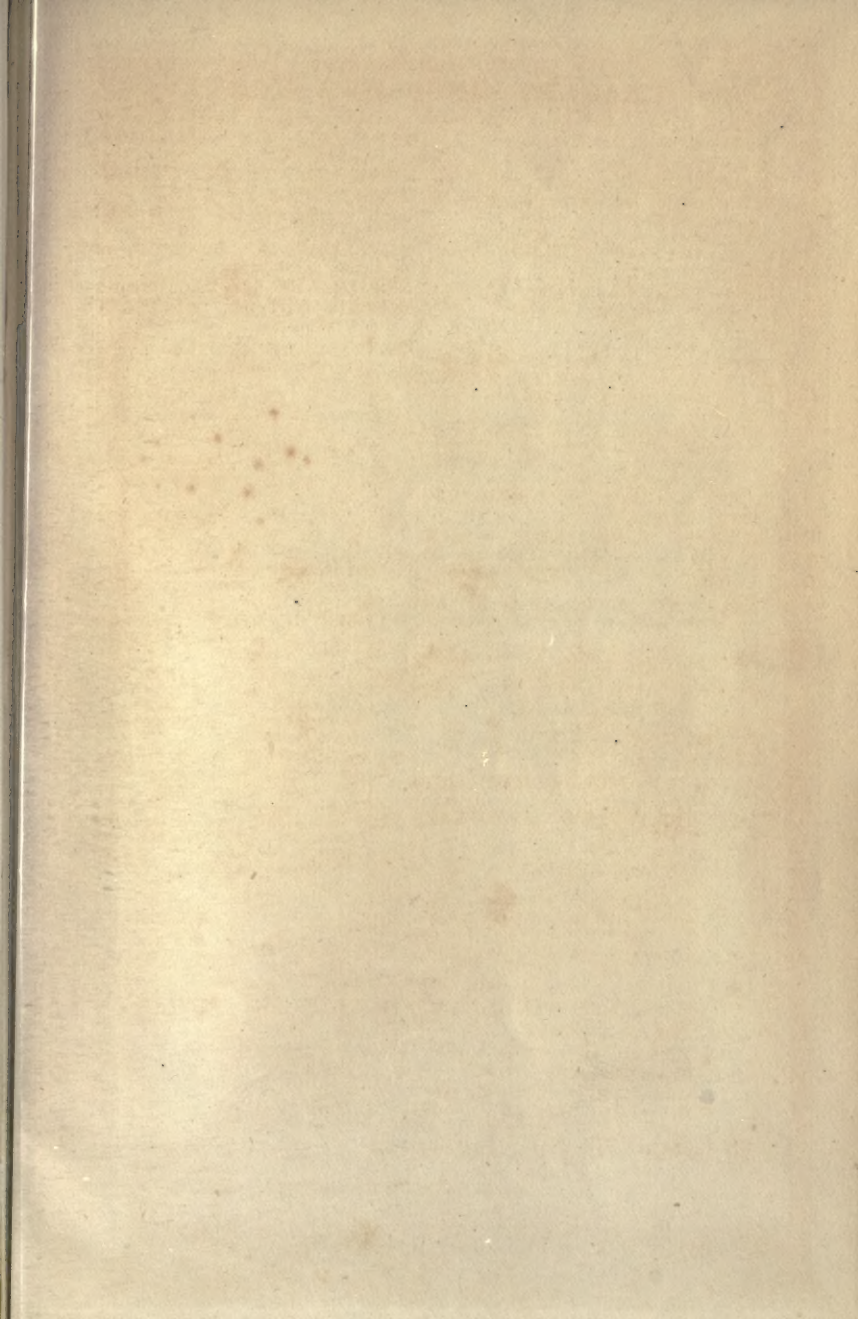
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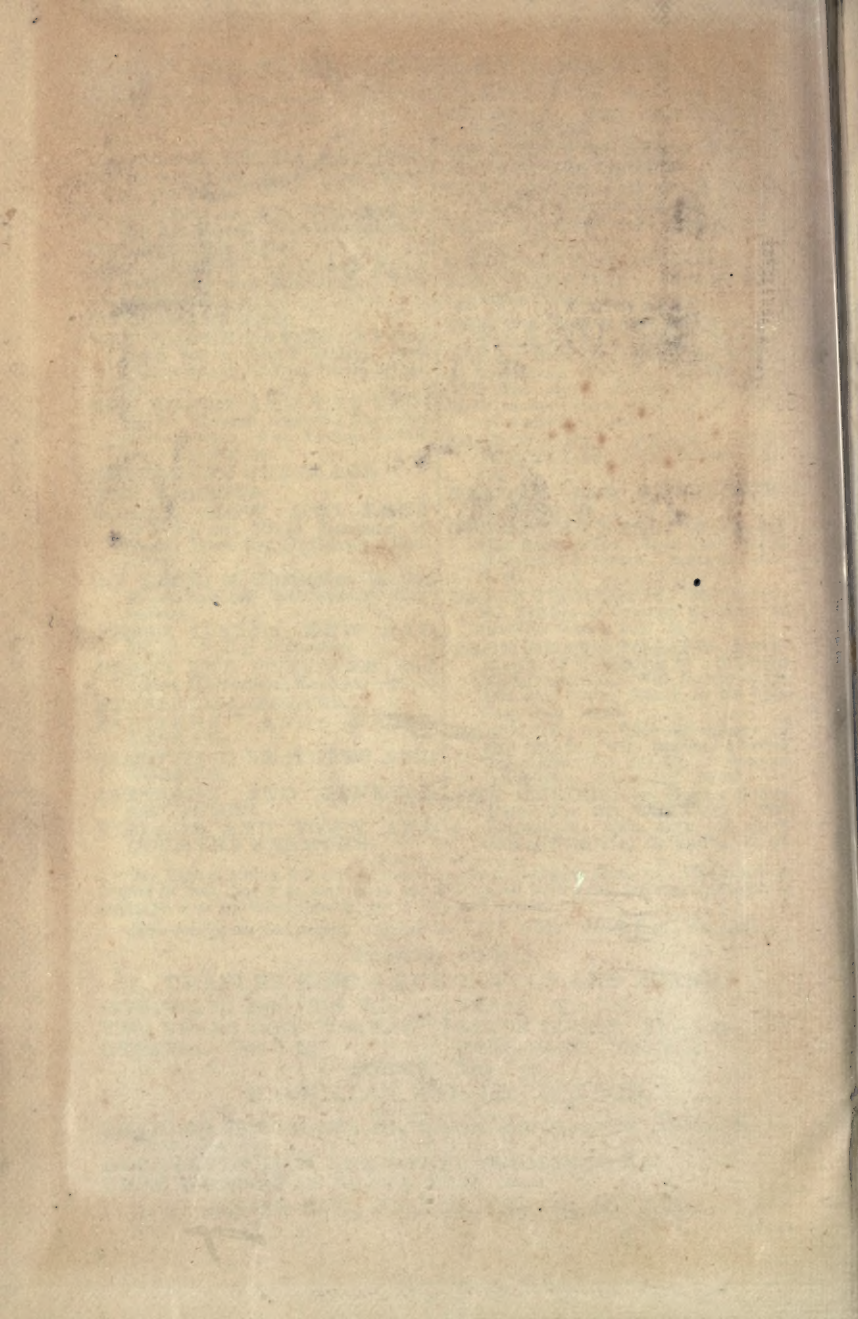
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